“The EU’s security policy towards China: a liberal-relational approach to hard security issues”


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**Abstract**

The literature on EU security policy towards China lacks an adequate conceptual and theoretical reflection of the terms security and security policy. Thus, the verdicts on EU security policy towards China – including the claim of a policy change in terms of realignment with the US – remain ambiguous. Therefore, I propose a conceptual framework for analyzing security and security policy. On that basis, I will show that the EU’s security policy towards China follows a liberal-relational understanding of security and security policy and has remained constant over the last one and a half decades. Thus I’m contesting the notion maintained by many scholars that there has been a realignment of the EU with US positions on East Asian security.
1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the new century, there has been a renewed interest in EU-China relations. With the declaration of the “strategic partnership” between the EU and China, the announcement of China’s participation in the Galileo satellite navigation project and the plans to lift the weapons embargo that has been in place since 1989, there was also growing interest of the scientific community in the strategic and security-related aspects of the EU’s policies towards China (see Casarini 2009: 4f.).

The main argument of this paper is that the large majority of contributions assessing the EU’s security policies towards China lack an adequate conceptual and theoretical reflection of the terms security and security policy. Thus the verdicts about the EU’s security policy towards China remain ambiguous.

In the first part of the paper I will therefore critically discuss the current literature on the EU’s security policy towards China. I will show that many authors implicitly draw on arguments derived from different theoretical approaches (like structural realism and the interdependence approach) and sometimes even mix up arguments from the different theoretical perspectives. The central concepts of security and security policy are not reflected upon at all, but rather mirror the lack of theoretical reflection of the respective authors. Especially the notion maintained by many scholars that there has been a realignment of the EU with US positions on East Asian security is not convincing in the light of these theoretical and conceptual shortcomings.

In the second part, I will therefore propose a conceptual framework for analyzing security and security policy which can also serve as a basis for further research on these issues in general. I will argue that one can differentiate two basic – and idealypical – understandings of security: an actor-related understanding and a relational understanding of security.

In the third and last part, I will analyze the EU’s security policy towards China by means of discourse analysis. This analytical approach is particularly suited to tackle this issue as security and the factors that might compromise it are of fundamental importance to any social or political entity, evoking an immediate feeling of urgency and danger. One can therefore assume that there are deep seated configurations of meanings, norms and values associated to security and security policy which can be conceptualized as a discourse on
these matters. I will show that the EU’s approach to security policy towards China is essentially a liberal-relational approach and that this approach has remained constant over the last one and a half decades.

2. Shortcomings of the scholarly literature

The literature on EU security policy towards China, which consists to a large extent of policy-oriented articles, does not adequately reflect the different meanings of the central concept security and their underlying theoretical assumptions.¹

Roughly speaking, there are two strands of literature. One strand implicitly draws on the assumptions of structural realism (Waltz 1979). It is assumed that security can only be ensured by either increasing one’s own military capabilities or by engaging in alliances against a superior power – or, as proposed by Stephen Walt, against the most threatening power (Walt 1997). An increase in economic exchange between states and a resulting interdependence as well as international institutions are seen as having hardly any effect on the international system (Waltz 2000). Authors adhering to this approach therefore assume that as the EU does not have defense commitments or military capacities in the East Asian region, the EU cannot be a security actor in that region (Bailes/Wetter 2007, Berkofsky 2006, Möller 2004, Bersick 2009a, Bersick 2009b, van der Putten/Chu Shulong 2011).

The second strand draws on the assumptions of the interdependence approach by Keohane and Nye (Keohane/Nye 1977). It is assumed that the security of states may be endangered by threats in the economic or environmental realm, thus military force as a means to achieve security may become “largely irrelevant” (Keohane/Nye 1987: 738). Instead, so called soft power resources may become more and more important (Nye 2004). As a consequence, some authors recognize a proper security approach of the EU towards East Asia and China (Gill 2008, Algieri 2005, Soerensen 2007, Jokela 2009, Bersick 2007).

Thus, the verdicts on the EU’s security approach towards China differ in an irreconcilable way: While Bailes and Wetter conceive of the EU’s security approach as an “immature

¹ To a certain extent, Oedgaard and Biscop (2007) constitute an exception in so far as they conceptualize the EU’s security approach as laid down in the European Security Strategy within the framework of “global public goods”. 
mishmash of selective blindness, wishful thinking, the profit motive, and the sheer lack of resources and will to stand up to Beijing” (Bailes/Wetter 2007: 158), Sebastian Bersick concludes in the same volume that the EU’s security approach even has a “comparative advantage in dealing with the ‘rise’ of China and East Asia that the USA’s approach […] cannot produce” (Bersick 2007: 230).

Similarly, some authors recognize a change in the EU’s security approach towards China, while others don’t. Among the proponents of a policy change, however, there is no consensus about the causes as well as the nature of such a change.

One the one hand, authors observe a “much more cautious” approach (Bersick 2008: 111) or a “rethinking” of the EU’s approach towards China (Stumbaum 2007). David Shambaugh argues that the EU documents published after the row over the arms embargo “reflect a change in tone, substance, and approach to China from past precedent”. However, he concludes in the same article, that “none of these adjustments have been too wrenching, causing more minor tactical adaptations on both sides” (Shambaugh 2007).

Authors that conceive of the change as an alignment of the EU’s security-political positions with those of the United States (Casarini 2009, Casarini 2011, Bersick 2008, Grant/Barysch 2008, Gill 2010) identify three causes for such a change of policy: First, the growing Chinese influence in the political, economic and military realm (Bersick 2009b: 30f.) as well as a growing number of disputed issues in EU-China relations such as the human rights situation in China or China’s policies in Africa (Gill 2010: 262). Secondly, the US is said to have played a major role in the reorientation of the EU’s policy towards China. However, while Grant and Barysch ascribe this influence of the US to the fact that the “Bush administration […] has become progressively softer during its time in office” (Grant/Barysch 2008: 60), Casarini contends that it was the “strong reaction” of the United States that “would eventually lead EU policy makers to reassess their foreign and security policy in East Asia” (Casarini 2009: 175f.). Finally, the third factor is said to be the changes of European leaders in Germany (2005) and France (2007) as well as the coming into office of the European Commission under José Manuel Barroso in 2004 (Casarini 2009, Gill 2010, Grant/Barysch 2008). The policy papers that were published after the row over the arms embargo, namely the European Commission’s communication on China (2006) and the Council’s Guidelines on the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy in East Asia (2007), serve as chief evidence in all these
argumentations.
These inconsistencies of the verdicts are – as mentioned above – a consequence of a neglect of theoretical and conceptual reflection on security and security policy. This fact becomes best tangible in the argumentation of Nicola Casarini (2009): He argues that the reason to engage in a strategic partnership with China which included the cooperation in the satellite navigation project Galileo and the plans to lift the arms embargo, was the attempt “by some EU political and corporate leaders, to [...] promote European autonomy in security affairs”, i.e. to engage in “soft balancing” against the US (Casarini 2009: 10f.). This is at its core an argument that draws on realist assumptions. However, following a balance-of-power logic and the general assumptions of structural realism, only structural changes in the international system – i.e. the distribution of power within the system – may bring about changes in the foreign policy of states (cf. Waltz 2000). Casarini, in contrast, draws on arguments that are actor-specific: according to him, the reasons for the gradual realignment of the EU with the US between 2005 and 2008 (cf. Casarini 2009: 14f., 176ff.) were “changes in the political leadership in some of the large EU member states (particularly Germany and France), the formation of a new (and more pro-American) European Commission headed by Manuel Barroso, [...] the accession to the EU of the more Atlanticist Central and Eastern European countries [...], and the emergence of ‘negative’ perceptions about China among European public opinions” (Casarini 2009: 177). This theoretically ambiguous argument is picked up again in the confusion about the foreign policy paradigm that the EU is said to pursue: On the one hand, the EU is said to pursue a balancing policy towards the US; on the other hand, the EU is allegedly unable to reconcile its “idealist approach [...] towards China” with the “realities of a Hobbesian balance of power in East Asia” (Casarini 2009: 15).\(^2\)

To sum up: the neglect of theoretical and conceptual reflection on security and security policy leads to an ambiguity and inconsistency of the verdicts concerning the very existence of a EU security policy towards China, the nature of such a policy and the question whether there was a change in this policy or not. This fact is problematic especially for a policy-oriented body of literature, as Arnold Wolfers has pointed out in his seminal article in 1952: if the concept of security is used “without specifications it leaves room for more confusion

\(^2\) Emphasis by the author.
than sound political counsel or scientific usage can afford” (Wolfers 1952: 483).

3. Security and security policy: a conceptual analysis

In the following section, I will outline several dimensions of the concepts security and security policy to clarify the underlying conceptual distinctions. This then will serve as the basis for analyzing the EU’s security approach towards China. I will argue that there are two basic understandings of security that can be distinguished: an actor-specific understanding that conceptualizes security as an attribute of an actor that this actor can acquire, and a relational understanding that conceptualizes security as an attribute of a relationship between actors that can only be achieved by all actors for all actors.

Following Baldwin (Baldwin 1997) and Daase (Daase 2010), security can be conceptualized with regard to several dimensions. For the purposes of this paper, I will concentrate on the three most important dimensions, which are the referent object, the values to be protected and the threats to these values of the respective referent object.

Traditionally, the referent object for which security needs to be provided was the nation state. In the course of the widening-deepening debates within the field of International Security Studies, the “narrowness of the military state-centric agenda” became problematic (Buzan/Hansen 2009: 187). The referent object was conceptualized beyond the nation state to include individual or human security, the security of (ethnic) groups or societies as well as the security of regional systems, the international or the global system (Buzan/Hansen 2009: 189, Daase 2010: 9-12). In close relationship to the referent object is the question for the security provider as these two are not necessarily identical (cf. Krahmann 2008).

The values to be protected are generally conceived of as the survival of the referent object. In the case of states, this is translated into “political independence and territorial integrity” (Baldwin 1997: 13). However, the values may comprise many more aspects than just survival: economic welfare and the maintenance of the international economic and financial relations as well as the maintenance of the sphere of political and military influence, the preservation of the environment and the natural resources and the provision of humanitarian protection.
in cases of catastrophes and conflicts (Daase 2010: 6ff.). The question of why certain values become issues of security considerations is central to the *securitization* approaches as for example in the Copenhagen School (Buzan/Hansen 2009, Huysmans 1998).

The conceptualization of the *threats* that endanger the values of a certain referent object is crucial for the understanding of *security* and *security policy*. There are three basic ways of conceptualizing them: the first and most abstract conceptualization is threats as *risks*. In reference to Daase, risks can be conceived of as threats which have not yet become an actuality but still are *in statu nascendi*. The combination of the increasingly complex and accelerated inter- and transnational relations of various actors such as states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, multinational companies, (ethnic) groups, networks or even individuals and the global spread of diseases or the availability of weapons of mass destruction create risks which can develop – if not addressed by preventive security measures – into actual threats to the different referent objects (Daase 2010).

Second, *threats* can be conceived of as *vulnerabilities* in terms of the interdependence approach in IR. In an interdependent world, political autonomy, economic welfare, societal stability or political legitimacy may be endangered by the externalities of policies of other non-hostile actors by the “costliness of making effective adjustments to a changed environment” or the “costs imposed by external events even after policies have been altered” (Keohane/Nye 1989).

Third, and most concretely, *threats* can be defined actor-related as emanating from other actors, mostly states. This can be done in two different ways, the first being the classic realist conception, in which potentially adversarial states with hostile intentions and large military capabilities compromise the security of the referent object and thus create a more or less permanent situation of danger. The second way is to conceptualize states not as necessarily hostile but as having and pursuing their own more or less legitimate interests that may, however, be conflicting with the more or less legitimate interests of other states. *Security* then is a relational concept, i.e. an attribute of a relationship between actors: *Security* then is about “gaining a degree of confidence about [...] relationships that comes through sharing certain commitments, which, in turn, provides a degree of reassurance and predictability”; security thus “comes from cooperating to achieve security without depriving others of it” (Williams 2008: 6; see also Daase 2010: 14).
According to the different understandings of security as outlined above, different ways of achieving security can be differentiated. Elke Krahmann (2008) identifies “three distinct meanings of security in terms of their intended outcomes” (absence of threat, survival of threat and suspension of threat) and proposes three “mechanisms of security”: prevention, protection and deterrence. I argue that the meaning “suspension of threat” is still underdeveloped in her analysis and propose a second mechanism to achieve a “suspension of threats” besides deterrence which I label détente.

First, prevention tries to deal with threats before they become an actual threat and is thus concerned with the causes of a threat: “Ideally, security providers can eliminate these causes, for instance through the resolution of political differences before they erupt into conflict” (Krahmann 2008: 382). Preventive measures can be applied to all three concepts of threat: risk assessment, adapting the state economy to the global dynamics and engaging other states in dialogues and confidence-building measures can all contribute to address the causes of potential threats.

Second, protection is concerned with “containing the consequences” for the values of a referent object when a threat has become an actuality and – in the end – assuring the survival of the referent object, for example by the provision of air-raid shelters (ibid: 383).

Third, deterrence and détente both seek “to hold off a threat from becoming an actuality” (ibid.: 382). The concept of deterrence, however, requires the presence of a hostile actor that is able to respond to deterring policies. By increasing the perceived costs of carrying out a threat or an attack, the security provider tries to convince the adversary “that the consequences, if they carry out their planned threat, would be disastrous” (ibid: 382). This conception of security is closely related to an understanding of security as a commodity or an attribute of an actor. By mechanisms of misperception, however, deterrence potentially may increase the insecurity of an actor rather than increase its security. This may lead to the classic constellation of the security dilemma: “Striving to attain security from such attack, they are driven to acquire more and more power in order to escape the impact of the power of others. This, in turn, renders the others more insecure and compels them to prepare for the worst. Since none can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on” (Herz 1950: 157). The concept of détente, in contrast, does not presuppose the presence of hostile actors,
but rather assumes that different actors possess different and thus possibly conflicting (vital) interests. Achieving security is then about reconciliating conflicting interests by policies of confidence-building, mutual reassurance, transparency (in military affairs) and multilateral, institutionalized conflict mediation. Thus, the security of all actors involved can be increased as the feeling of insecurity of each actor is decreased. Security then is an attribute of a relationship.

Sketching out the two ideal-typical forms of the actor-specific and the relational concepts of security, these two concepts can be distinguished along the three dimensions outlined above.

In an actor-specific understanding of security, which relies on the basic theoretical assumptions of realism, the referent object and the security provider are identical. Every actor has to guarantee its own security. The values therefore comprise only values of the actor concerned. While risks and vulnerabilities may be considered as a security issue, the main threats to security, however, emanate from other, potentially hostile actors.

In a relational understanding of security, the referent object and the security provider are not identical, as the security of other actors – to which the actor in question may contribute – is a crucial precondition for the security of the referent object. The values therefore may comprise also values of other actors that are to be secured. Risks and vulnerabilities take a more prominent position in the threat analysis. The crucial difference to an actor-specific understanding is, however, the perception of other actors: these are not conceived as hostile per se, but as potentially just having conflicting interests which are to be reconciled through negotiation in multilateral institutions, confidence-building measures and a rule-based international system.

In both understandings of security prevention and protection play a role as mechanisms to achieve security. While a relational approach may focus more on preventive policies and an actor-specific approach may focus more on protective measures, they rather differ in the emphasis placed on the two options.

The crucial difference between the two understandings, however, lies in the conceptualization of the other actors and thus in the application of deterrence policies or in the application of policies of détente: in an actor-specific understanding, the focus will predominantly be on the deterrence of harmful actions by hostile actors, while in a relational
understanding, the focus will be on policies of détente to settle the differences peacefully.

4. The discourse of EU security policy towards China: A liberal-relational approach to hard security issues

Discourse analysis and EU security policy towards China

The starting point of discursive approaches is the assumption that it is “problematic to ground one’s analysis in ‘given’ subjects or objects because both are constituted discursively”, i.e. “reality” is “necessarily categorized and conceptualized” by the use of language and thus is discursively formed into “structures of meaning” (Wæver 2004: 198, see also Neumann 2008, Larsen 1997, Hansen 2006). According to Wæver, these structures of meaning influence foreign policy in as much as they constitute the “general lines” of that policy (Wæver 2004: 205).

However, the actions taken cannot be directly linked with the discourses as actors do have “the possibility of acting strategically in relation to discourse – both in relation to how they shape a political position in relation to a given discursive position and in how they try to transform the discursive structure itself” (ibid: 199). Therefore, a causal relationship between discourse and actions taken by policy makers will not be assumed (cf. Diez 2001). Rather, discourses enable certain actions to be taken, as it is highly unlikely to assume that political actors can continuously act against a certain discourse, given the necessity “for any political leader to be able to make sense of the big question of ‘where are we heading’, that is to be able to construct narratives” of the issue area in question, “where it is coming from and where it is going” (Wæver 2004: 205f.). That means, discourses not only make certain actions possible, they also legitimize these actions by grounding them in a larger framework of accepted structures of meaning.

Discourse analysis therefore cuts “into these webs of meaning” (ibid: 198) in order to carve out the patterns of meaning associated with different subjects or objects. Such an analysis is usually done by conceptualizing an individual speech act as a representation of more general patterns of meaning, i.e. texts and other products of language are seen as fragments of a discourse. Thus, a text can contain fragments of more than just one discourse (cf. Kunz 2005).
The central methodological problem now is how to identify “a discourse when you meet one?” (Wæver 2004: 206). Kunz suggests delineating different discourses along the lines of issues, disciplines or actors (Kunz 2005: 69). For the present case this would mean to specify the discourse according to the issue area of EU security policy as represented by the relevant EU policy makers in their statements, speeches and texts. The question then is whether certain patterns of meanings can be identified concerning the concepts security and security policy.

The difference between the policy-character and the discourse-character of the policy papers and statements is established by asking different questions when dealing with them: to carve out the discourse that these speech acts represent, I will ask how security and security policy are conceptualized in general in these texts. It is thus not about why something has been said or written at a specific moment in time but about the general meanings of security and security policy, the way they are interconnected and related to other norms and values.

The EU security policy towards China: a liberal-relational approach

Analyzing the discourse of EU security policy towards China, one finds that the referent object is, of course, the EU itself. However, as will be shown below, a precondition for the EU’s security is stability in East Asia. That is to say that the security of the East Asian states is inseparably connected to the security of the EU. The EU therefore becomes a security provider for the East Asian states while these are themselves associated in managing the security relations in the region, thus becoming security providers for the EU: The EU should “associate Asian countries in the management of international affairs and in particular [...] encourage them to play a more active role in multilateral actions with a view to maintaining international peace and security (European Commission 1994: 2; European Commission 2001b, European Commission 2006, Council of the European Union 2007).

The core value of the EU that needs to be secured is its leading role in the world economy: the “Union needs as a matter of urgency to strengthen its economic presence in Asia in order to maintain its leading role in the world economy” (European Commission 1994: 1). This value remains the underlying central concern of the EU’s security engagement in East Asia. In the Council’s Guidelines on EU foreign and security policy in East Asia this is explicitly taken up, stating that East Asia accounted for one quarter of the EU’s global trade in 2006 and is
thus key to its global competitiveness (Council of the European Union 2007: 2).

The main other values that constantly appear, namely the political, military, economic, social and environmental stability in East Asia and China, are thus secondary and a mere function of the main goal to maintain the EU’s leading position in the global economy: “The main thrust of the present and future policy in Asia is related to economic matters. However, this major component of the Union policy has to be presented in the framework of the political and security balance of power in the region” (European Commission 1994: 2; see also European Commission 1995: 5; European Commission 2001b: 3f.; Council of the European Union 2007: 2). Therefore, the distinction made by parts of the scholarly literature between economic and security-political interests is not adequate when analyzing the EU’s policy towards China, as these two spheres of interests are largely identical. 3

The direct threats to the EU’s leading role are conceived of as protectionist trends in the world economy. Protectionism and regionalism “loom as potential threats” to the global economy and thus to Europe’s leading role within it (European Commission 2003: 3). “If the Union loses out on the economic miracle taking place in Asia, this will have political costs, and at the very least it will exacerbate the calls for more defensive policies from those who view Asia as a threat rather than as a valuable partner, which in turn will further reduce the benefits to be gained from Asia, and so on, in a spiral of decline” (European Commission 1994: 11). The “unparalleled political fluidity” that followed the end of the Cold War has the potential to create unpredictable challenges and risks to which Europe and East Asia have to adapt in order to address them adequately and to maintain regional stability (European Commission 1994: 1; cf. European Commission 2003, Council of the European Union 2007). This fluidity may result in regional conflicts caused by “rapid economic growth, territorial disputes, increasingly ambitious armament programmes, the potential for distrust in such a large region and the weakness of the multilateral organizations for political consultation” (European Commission 1994: 7). It is especially the “uncertainties” generated by geopolitical changes “combined with unresolved historical and territorial disputes” that have the potential to create tensions (Council of the European Union 2007: 2).

Within this context, the internal stability of China was a prevalent theme of the security

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3 As this may be a highly controversial point, I think I have to state this point as clearly as possible: This paper is not about evaluating whether certain approaches to security policy are “right” or “wrong” nor is it about addressing the efficacy of the different approaches. It is about filling a gap in the literature by offering a concept to analyze security policy and by carving out the particularities of the EU security approach towards China.
considerations of the EU. The continuing economic and societal transformation process of China has been a central concern for the EU (European Commission 1995). These concerns had become especially strong in the years around the turn of the century, in context with China’s accession to the WTO and the leadership changes in 2003. Regarding the Chinese reform process, “nothing can be taken for granted”: “Increasing disparities in regional development” as well as a rise in urban and rural unemployment which may further strain China’s social security system; “increased internal and external migration” as well as the “upcoming leadership changes [...] are key concerns” for the EU (European Commission 2001: 6; European Commission 2003).

Since 2006, however, these concerns have been replaced by a new element: since then, Chinese competition itself is seen as a challenge to the global competitiveness of the European economy (European Commission 2006, Council of the European Union 2006). However, the answer to this new challenge remains within the logic of the prevailing discourse: “The answer to growing competition with China cannot be to protect the EU from fair competition. Instead the EU should continue to pursue an active policy of openness at home while demanding a similar effort from China” (Council of the European Union 2006: 11).

While the notion of associating the East Asian countries in the maintenance of international peace and security was present from the first policy papers, this gradually developed into the notion of common security challenges and joint security (European Commission 2001a: 4; Solana 2005; Council of the European Union 2007: 3). The goal of the EU’s security policy towards China should be “to offer joint solutions to global problems” (European Commission 2006: 2). This would be best done in the framework of “strong regional institutions based on clear recognition of shared interests” (Council of the European Union 2007: 7). This threat conception in terms of common challenges that all major state actors face, becomes more and more prominent in the discourse of EU security policy towards China. Javier Solana (2005) and Herman van Rompoy (2011) underline the need for cooperation and mutual understanding to face the common challenges in a preventive way: “interdependence is the political reality of today [...]. Every country is also shaped by what is happening around it; negatively and positively [...]” (van Rompoy 2011). That’s why one has to “understand the other’s choices and constraints, its hopes and fears, its past experiences and its view of the
world”, to manage the interdependence of the 21st century by shared responsibility, cooperation and openness. Thus, “we are becoming part of the solution of the other side’s challenges” (van Rompoy 2011; cf. Council of the European Union 2012: 1).

The policies to be pursued are largely concerned with preventing conflicts and with establishing fora in which conflicting interests can be reconciled, i.e. fora enabling policies of détente. The core theme of EU security policy towards China are measures focused on integrating China into a rule-based international system (European Commission 1995: 4; European Commission 1998: 5f.; European Commission 2001a: 7; Council of the European Union 2003: II; European Commission 2006: 10-12; Council of the European Union 2006: 6; Council of the European Union 2007: 1), promoting regional integration and cooperation on regional security-political issues (European Commission 1995: 5; European Commission 1998: 7; European Commission 2001a: 15; European Commission 2003: 8; European Commission 2006: 11; Council of the European Union 2007: 7) and supporting China’s transition into an open, democratic, market-economy based system respecting human rights4 (European Commission 1998: 9f.; European Commission 2001a: 10-12; European Commission 2003: 7; European Commission 2006: 4; Council of the European Union 2006: 8; Council of the European Union 2007: 1). As far as the latter aspect is concerned, the EU kept a close eye and put a strong focus on China’s internal development in the run-up to the leadership changes of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2003 (European Commission 2001a: 6; European Commission 2003: 3, 6).

Thus, while the understanding of security becomes clearly visible in the conceptualization of the referent object (the EU and the East Asian states) and the security provider (also the EU and the East Asian states) as well as the conceptualization of the threats predominantly in terms of vulnerabilities (protectionism) and risks (fluidity, uncertainties), the absence of any notion of a hostile actor clearly stands out. And the policies to be pursued (integrating a democratic, market-economy based China into a rule-based international system) almost make up a textbook case of a liberal approach to security policy (cf. Navari 2008: 42f.).

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4 In its 1995 Communication on China, the European Commission directly links the respect for human rights with the long-term social and political stability (European Commission 1995: 6).
A liberal-relational approach to hard security issues

Addressing the so-called hard security issues which are listed in the Guidelines (2007), such as the nuclear program of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), the dispute across the Taiwan Strait and the shifting strategic balance in the East Asian region due to China’s economic, political and military rise, the EU sticks with its liberal-relational approach: “The EU’s long term aim should be increasing regional integration and the emergence of strong regional institutions based on clear recognition of shared interests” (Council of the European Union 2007: 7; cf. European Commission 2006: 11). Deepening the dialogues with all actors concerned, calling on all actors to refrain from actions that could be misperceived and promoting confidence building measures remain the principal means for fostering security and stability in East Asia.

However, what is most significant about the EU’s approach to hard security issues and which makes up the difference to the US approach, is what is missing in the discourse: this is the notion of hostile actors, the notion of alliances and the support for the US’s military-based approach to East Asian security. To be sure, there is the call for taking into account the “distinct perspective on the region’s security challenges” of the US and to recognize the US’s network of bilateral alliances (Council of the European Union 2007: 7) in the region. These statements, however, are amended by temporal limitations such as “for the time being”, “for the foreseeable future” and “at present”. Despite the general statement that the EU should cooperate with the US on challenges arising from East Asia (ibid: 3), there is no doubt in the policy papers that the approach of the EU is essentially different from the one of the US.

Succeeding policy statements underlined this approach: “This means sharing decisions more, and creating a greater stake for others. Faced with common problems, there is no substitute for common solutions” (European Council 2008: 12). And: “The European Union must be [...] ready to share in the responsibility for global security and to take the lead in the definition of joint responses to common challenges” (European Council 2010: 1). Thus, there is no sign of the US notion of “hedging” against a non-peaceful Chinese rise and thus no sign of an alignment with US positions.5

5 While the US National Security Strategy of 2002 and the National Defence Strategy (2008) state the policy of “hedging” against a non-peaceful rise of China quite unmistakably, the National Security Strategy of the Obama administration (2010) is much softer on this issue. Therefore one is even tempted to argue that the US position towards China has aligned with the EU approach.
5. **Conclusion**

To sum up: to overcome the shortcomings of the literature on the EU’s security policy towards China, this paper has proposed a conceptual framework to analyze the EU’s security-political approach towards China. In fact, this framework may serve to analyze any actor’s understanding of and approach to security and security policy. One that basis, one can now proceed to evaluate the effectiveness of the respective security policies.

This analysis has further shown that the EU’s approach to security is based on a liberal-relational understanding of security and that this approach has not changed in terms of realignment with the US. Rather to the contrary: the EU’s liberal-relational approach has not only remained constant over the last one and a half decade, it could also be argued that with the perception of a growing competition from China, the need to more consequently apply the principles of this approach has been articulated.

The questions that are still unanswered concern the efficacy as well as a normative evaluation of the EU’s security-political approach. These questions as well as the question why the EU adheres to such a liberal-relational approach (beyond the somewhat pointed argumentation of Kagan) require further – and more theoretically informed – research.
References


