

Geopolitical Cooperation with East Asia At Work

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The 2016 Global Strategy of the European Union (EUGS)¹ advocates that the Union strengthen its coordination and unity in order to meet the challenges inside and outside the Union. The Union has had no option but to expand and deepen its international engagement.

Thus, “the Global Strategy’s push for a European Union of security and defence, in complementarity with NATO and all our partners, anticipated the debate on the military burden sharing across the Atlantic. In a moment when the crucial role of the United Nations’ system, the importance of development cooperation, or the reality of climate change is put into question, the Global Strategy has been a reminder of the European Union’s strategic interest in a cooperative world order.”²

The nexus of internal and external security plays a particularly important role, not only in the immediate neighbourhood but specifically in relation to Asia, which is of importance for the European Union (EU) whether measured in trade, investment or geopolitics:

There is a direct connection between European prosperity and Asian security. In light of the economic weight that Asia represents for the EU—and vice versa—peace and stability in Asia are a prerequisite for

¹ *A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy* (2016), https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf.

² European External Action Service (2017), “From Shared Vision to Common Action: Implementing the EU Global Strategy—Year 1,” Federica Mogherini, foreword, p. 6, <http://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/implementing-eu-global-strategy-year-1>. See also Michael Reiterer (2017), “Die Globale Strategie der Europäischen Union—den Visionen Taten folgen lassen,” *Integration*, Nr. 1/2017.

our prosperity. We will deepen economic diplomacy and scale up our security role in Asia.³

The EU is a very important economic actor in Asia. The EU is China's biggest trading partner, the third largest for Japan and the fourth most important export destination for South Korea. The EU is the largest investor in Asia—China, Japan, South Korea and India account for one quarter of total EU external trade (2016). If you take into account, it is only natural that the EUGS highlights that European prosperity and Asian peace and stability are closely intertwined. The nexus between economy and security as well as between development and security brings the EU closer to the Asia-Pacific than public opinion either in Europe or Asia has so far recognized.

There is, however, a new element which changed this perception dramatically: The nuclear and missiles crises on the Korean Peninsula, for example, the disrespect by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) for international law, its missiles and nuclear tests, and the verbal threats exchanged between North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and United States (US) President Donald Trump, have thrust Asian security onto front pages and therefore on the minds of many, raising awareness not only in the international media but also among policymakers.

United Nation Secretary-General (UNSG) Antonio Guterres warned that “for the first time since the end of the Cold War we are now facing a nuclear threat.”⁴

The Economist, not known for hot-blooded comments or panic statements, sounded the alarm bells:

The pressing danger is of war on the Korean peninsula, perhaps this year. Donald Trump has vowed to prevent Kim Jong Un, North Korea's leader, from being able to strike America with nuclear-armed ballistic missiles, a capability that recent tests suggest he may have within months, if not already. Among many contingency plans, the Pentagon is considering a disabling pre-emptive strike against the North's nuclear

³ EUGS, p. 37. See also Michael Reiterer (2016), “Regional Security Architecture in the Asia-Pacific: What Role for the European Union?,” The ASAN Forum, Special Forum: Urgent Call for a Common Agenda between Europe and Asia, 30 June 2016, <http://www.theasanforum.org/regional-security-architecture-in-the-asia-pacific-what-role-for-the-eu/>.

⁴ “World At Risk Of ‘Nuclear Confrontation,’ UN Chief Warns,” Radio Free Europe, 16 February 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/un-guterres-world-at-risk-of-nuclear-confrontation-cold-war/29044113.html>.

sites. Despite low confidence in the success of such a strike, it must be prepared to carry out the president's order should he give it.⁵

This sombre assessment was echoed in the 2018 Security Report by the Munich Security Conference:

Trump vowed to respond to North Korean threats with “fire and fury like the world has never seen.” But if neither deterrence nor diplomacy are seen as viable approaches by the administration that has stressed it would never accept a nuclear-armed North Korea, a military option becomes more likely. US National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster recently argued that the risk of war with North Korea was “increasing every day.”⁶

Likewise the Preventive Priorities Survey 2018 of the Council on Foreign Relations⁷ maintained a “military conflict involving the United States, North Korea and its neighbouring countries” in Tier I, the highest of three tiers, with high impacts on US interests, while the likelihood is judged as moderate.

THE EU'S POLICY OF “CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT”

These developments have pushed the EU out of its comfort zone: Simply following other major players by rapidly implementing UN Security Council and autonomous sanctions at a new-found speed will not be enough. The North Korean nuclear and missile programme brings with it a legacy of thirty years of efforts to prevent and stall it.

The EU supported implementation of the 1994 Agreed Framework through financial contributions to the Korean Energy Development Organisation (KEDO) project, a failed attempt to trade off a plutonium-producing plant for less-proliferation-prone light water reactors.

The successive implementation of sanctions in the crises that have ensued since 2006 has not prevented North Korea from acquiring technology and materials to develop long-range missiles and nuclear weapons. The Six Party

⁵ *The Economist*, “The next war,” 27 January 2018 (leader; online edition).

⁶ Munich Security Report 2018, “To the Brink—and Back?,” <https://www.securityconference.de/en/discussion/munich-security-report/munich-security-report-2018/>.

⁷ Paul B. Stares (2017), “Preventive Priorities Survey 2018,” Council on Foreign Relations/Center for Preventive Action, Washington.

Talks and the 2005 September Agreement presented the hope of a multilateral solution, but this soon evaporated.

The Trump Administration formally ended the Obama doctrine of *strategic patience*, at least in name, and is applying a policy of *maximum pressure*. This doctrine is being implemented with mixed or confusing signals emanating from different parts of the Administration: National Security Council officials lean towards a more hardline approach, speaking about including military options (such as pre-emptive or preventive strikes, bloody nose), while the State Department, supported by the Pentagon, prioritises a diplomatic solution with military preparedness as a strong supportive tool. The recent change in the leadership of both institutions will certainly change the dynamics.

Preserving peace on the peninsula and avoiding another war, including the horrors of nuclear or conventional attacks on the metropolis of Seoul, is the priority of the South Koreans and their President, Moon Jae-in. This goal is shared by the EU, which advocates a diplomatic solution as the only viable one while supporting maximum pressure on the regime.

This EU commitment finds its expression in its policy of “Critical Engagement”.⁸ The EU can play a constructive role, especially in assisting in setting up and accompanying negotiating processes which are crisis prone and need long-term management.

The Olympics charm offensive by the North, drawing diligently on the Olympic Truce, has been taken up by the Republic of Korea, and now apparently by the US, as a chance to re-establish dialogue—irrespective of whether the North is pursuing the charm offensive out of tactical calculation or because sanctions are hurting.

Therefore the EU supported⁹ quickly the latest twist in the crisis cycle, which reminds one of the swine circle in economics: More or less out of the blue, or rather “white” as it happened in the White House in Washington, President Trump accepted a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un when being debriefed by South Korean envoys about their what appears to

⁸ “Council Conclusions on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” 17 July 2017, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/07/17/conclusions-korea/>.

⁹ “Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the European Parliament plenary session on peace prospects for the Korean Peninsula in the light of recent developments,” 13 March 2018, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/41269/speech-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-european-parliament-plenary_me.

have been a successful counter-visit to Pyongyang. After sports diplomacy¹⁰ at the highest level—the de facto head of state of the DPRK, Kim Yong-nam, and the sister of the leader, Kim Yo-yung, led the North Korean delegation to the PyeongChang Olympics as part of a well-orchestrated charm offensive—the special envoys of President Moon received a warm reception and most importantly the message that in addition to a bilateral intra-Korea summit in April, a summit with President Trump would be acceptable to discuss the denuclearisation of the peninsula, while voicing for the first time understanding for the joint-US-Korean drills; plus the assurance to refrain from testing during talks.

As everybody was taken by surprise, it is at the time of writing too early to guess about outcomes. However, the third inner-Korean summit on 27 April 2018—certainly a success in terms of symbolism—laid the groundwork for the US-DPRK summit. High-level contacts between the two parties, like the secret visit of then CIA director Pompeo to meet Chairman Kim in Pyeongyang to prepare the summit, add a dose of optimism. This needs, however, a counter-dose of realism: previous summits in 2000 and 2007 produced optimistic declarations which failed during implementation. Furthermore, the definition and nature of the core problem, “denuclearisation”, remains open and bridgeable at best, antagonistic and unbridgeable at worst. Summitry had picked up when Kim Jon-un paid a surprise visit to President Xi in March 2018 in an effort to strengthen his bargaining position for the upcoming summits and to take out a Chinese insurance policy in case of failure.

Helping to keep the main protagonists, the DPRK and the US, at the negotiating table could be a task for the EU to crack, especially if the talks run into (inevitable) difficulties. The EU’s experiences from the Balkans, Aceh, and Mindanao and in facilitating the agreement with Iran are best-practice examples to draw on.

President Moon sent a special envoy to Brussels soon after his election victory to express his interest in looking at lessons that could be learned from the EU’s experience in keeping the main protagonists at the table during the negotiations that led to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran. In drawing on the experience with the latter, verification of any agreement on denuclearisation will be crucial—an area where the EU

¹⁰ Michael Reiterer (2018), “Make sport, not war,” <http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Column/view?articleId=154410>.

could be helpful, also in cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Organisation.

EU leaders are now far more focussed on the Korean peninsula than was the case just a few years ago. The issue is regularly discussed by Foreign Ministers, including their informal “*Gymnich*” meeting, and included in Council Conclusions. South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha joined the 19 March 2018 Foreign Affairs Council upon invitation by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini for a direct interaction with her European counterparts. This had been preceded by an unusual visit of North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho to Sweden,¹¹ which represents not only the US in consular matters in the DPRK but has also been particularly active in track 2 and track 1.5 activities.

This is testimony to a new policy awareness of the EU in highlighting the concern and the importance attached to this hotspot. It is clearly understood that a major crisis would have severe repercussions on Europe. Just one economic example of this would be the fact that South Korea is the main source of semiconductors for the global IT industry. A crisis on the peninsula would immediately have worldwide consequences. Indeed, when China imposed de facto sanctions on South Korea because of the deployment of the US THAAD anti-missile system, it continued nevertheless importing semiconductors, and even in increased quantities, as production lines resist to a certain degree political tensions.

The crisis on the Korean peninsula is not the only issue bringing Asian security issues onto European front pages and the desks of policymakers. In addition, there are concerns about the security situation in the South China Sea¹² and the piracy problems in Asia and at the Horn of Africa—the vital sea-link between Asia and Europe.

¹¹ Reuters (17 March 2018), “Sweden, North Korea talks end, may help pave way for Trump-Kim encounter,” <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-northkorea-missiles-sweden/sweden-north-korea-talks-end-may-help-pave-way-for-trump-kim-encounter-idUKKCN1GT0M3>.

¹² “Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on Recent Developments in the South China Sea,” 11 March 2016, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/11/hr-declaration-on-bealf-of-eu-recent-developments-south-china-sea/>. “Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the Award rendered in the Arbitration between the Republic of the Philippines and the People’s Republic of China,” 15 July 2016, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/07/15-south-china-sea-arbitration/>.

GEONOMICS AT WORK

Trade and economics are part of the great-power competition in the region. As the largest market in the world the EU is strongly involved in competition with China, Japan and the US. In the Asian region the European Union is a late comer to the free trade talks, having banked on the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the completion of the Doha Round longer than others. However, the EU has had to change gears: While a region-to-region EU-Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) free trade agreement (FTA) had to be put on temporary hold, the EU concluded a comprehensive FTA with South Korea and with one ASEAN member, Singapore. Negotiations are underway with India, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Australia and New Zealand. These FTAs will be complemented by political cooperation agreements. In addition, the recent de facto conclusion of a FTA/Economic Partnership Agreement and a Strategic Partnership Agreement with Japan has a strong economic security element. It also underlines the attachment of the EU and Japan to the multilateral trading system and liberal order, which is itself an important policy statement.

The EU stands by South Korea and the seven-year-old FTA which has increased trade in both directions. This stands in contrast to the US, which is renegotiating after heavy pressure the bilateral United States-Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA), the so-called “worst deal ever”, according to the mercantilist attitude of President Trump.

Further engaging with China to keep it within its professed attachment to the liberal order has become a major policy challenge; again *The Economist* put it succinctly on the cover of its 3 March 2018 edition: “How the West got China wrong”. President Xi, now allowed life-long “re-election”, has put China clearly on a course to implement the two centennial goals—2021 “moderately prosperous society” to commemorate the founding of the Party; 2049 “fully developed nation” to honour the founding of the People’s Republic—which will make it an established global player in political and economic terms. Its rise will make it necessary to find a new equilibrium in the international system.

For instance, China and the EU have agreed to negotiate a bilateral investment agreement. The EU has a vital interest in ensuring the compatibility of an emerging network of bi-, pluri- and inter-regional agreements with international trade rules and to work with all partners to assure open regionalism.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is in this context a tool to strengthen China's grip on the Eurasian continent in re-establishing and modernising traditional trade routes, and also for political purposes. On the one hand, this challenges Russia, which regards former Soviet republics in Central Asia as still being in its sphere of influence. On the other hand, this is a challenge for the EU, not only in terms of Central Asia but also in terms of candidate and member states which are part of BRI.

The Global Strategy proposed to strengthen Europe's relations with a „connected Asia.“ Therefore, there is a need to develop a way to upgrade connectivity between Asia and Europe in a sustainable and rules-based way. A policy paper in the form of a Joint Communication to determine the EU's approach to connectivity is under preparation for 2018. It takes a broad view on connectivity—transport infrastructure and services by land, sea and air, digital and energy links, as well as people-to-people contacts. While China focuses on infrastructure, the EU's objective will be to enhance the governance of Euro-Asian connectivity and help meet the sizeable financing gap, while ensuring the sustainability of the projects and a level playing field for EU businesses. There is also a strong political and security component, thereby accentuating the need to maintain EU solidarity in terms of infrastructure in general and transport and energy in particular. Strings attached to financing BRI projects or the threat of being excluded from the scheme has already impacted the attitude of some EU Member States and affected their domestic politics.

There are also strong voices advocating the vetting of Chinese investments in the EU beyond infrastructure, including from a national security angle—investments in the solar industry or accumulating large shares in the European automotive industry are just two examples of many.¹³

GEPOLICIES TO FOLLOW

This volatility in Asia is further enhanced by the uncertainty about the future distribution of power between the US and an aspiring China (Thucydides trap), the legacies of the past nourishing the competitive nationalisms in China, Japan and South Korea, the lack of a viable regional security architecture as

¹³ European Parliamentary Research Service (2018), “EU framework for FDI screening,” <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-Briefing-614667-EU-framework-FDI-screening-FINAL.pdf>.

evidenced by the various maritime disputes, the uncertainty caused by the largely non-transparent rise of Chinese military expenditure, and the US's answer to China's rise in abandoning Obama's pivot as well as its economic leg, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Stepping in, the abandoned eleven partners continued talks and succeeded in signing the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP),¹⁴ taking their economic and political interests into their own hands and hedging against China.

The US's replacement policy is not clear yet. It ranges from strengthening the hub and spoke alliance system on the one hand, while sending mixed signals to China on the other hand, ranging from political cooperation to reining in the DPRK to threatening a trade war, resulting in repercussions on many allies, including the EU. Combined with the above-mentioned political brinksmanship of the DPRK leadership and its preparation for the final steps in developing a nuclear and missile capacity, the South China Sea island building occasionally challenged by freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) and finally—looming in the background—the unresolved issue of Taiwan—all of these issues demand multilateral diplomatic efforts in order to maintain peace.

As the US and China are in the process of re-evaluating their relationship, Russia is trying a comeback to the international scene by cooperating with China in areas where their interests merge. India is cozying up to the US while trying to establish itself as a regional power.

Within this context, the relative influence of Europe has diminished while the influence of Asia in global governance has increased. China is the Asian permanent member in the UN Security Council; India and Japan have ambitions for a permanent seat; the EU will lose a seat with BREXIT. Asian membership in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has increased: Japan is no longer the only Asian member (1964), but has been joined by Australia (1971), New Zealand (1973) and South Korea (1996). It is the same in the G20: while Japan was the sole Asian representative in the G7, China, India, South Korea, and Indonesia have joined Japan in the G20; South Korea was the first Asian country to host a G20 summit, in 2010, before Japan and China followed, as well as the first Asian country to host a Nuclear Security Summit, in 2012.

¹⁴ Matthew P. Goodman (2018), "From TPP to CPTPP," CSIS, 8 March 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/tpp-cptpp>.

The EU is, in turn, entertaining strategic partnerships with middle powers like South Korea and Japan and enhancing relations with Australia.

The relationship with India is getting back on track as shown by the successful and substantive EU-India Summit in October 2017. A dedicated India Strategy (Joint Communication and Council Conclusions) is under preparation for adoption in 2018. It will lay out the policy for an effective long-term engagement with India. This will help the EU to strengthen its engagement in the Indian Ocean, the strategically important transport connection between Asia and Europe. Furthermore, the concept of the “Indo-Pacific” got traction recently through the Trump Administration, not least as a means to counter China’s BRI initiative, which is focused on the Asia-Pacific. The US, India, Japan and Australia (Quad) floated the idea of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy based on respect for freedom of navigation on the seas, observance of the rule of law, and support for inclusive economic cooperation,” potentially supported by means to “fund infrastructure projects across the Indo-Pacific and as far afield as African states bordering the Indian Ocean.”¹⁵

Sharing the Eurasian continent and the improved connectivity that might come about through the improved infrastructure envisaged by the BRI demands a rethinking about the holistic approach of the EU Neighbourhood Policy, the Central Asia Strategy and the relationship with Russia. Realists thinking in zones of influence could re-erect the fences of the past which disappeared almost thirty years ago.

In working towards establishing a “strategic partnership” with ASEAN¹⁶ the EU supports another expression of multilateralism and a rules-based approach to international relations. As a longstanding member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the EU participates in the, so far, most important security forum in Asia, but change is in the making: While contributing to strengthening the ASEAN approach to regional integration and organisation, the East Asian Summit as well as the system around it (ministerial meetings, including ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus [ADMM+]) command

¹⁵ Alan Chong and Wu Shang-su (2018), “‘Indo-Pacific’ vs ‘Asia-Pacific’: Contending Visions?,” RSIS Commentary, no. 34, 28 February 2018. See also Eva Pejsova (2018), “The Indo-Pacific—A passage to Europe?,” EUISS Brief March 2018, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%203%20The%20Indo-Pacific.pdf>.

¹⁶ “The EU and ASEAN: a partnership with a strategic purpose,” Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, JOIN(2015) 22 final, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=JOIN:2015:22:FIN&from=EN>.

attention as this system furthered by ASEAN potentially plays a larger role in security policy. It complements the ARF, which is on the level of foreign ministers, through a meeting of heads of state or government.¹⁷ As part of the celebration of 40 years of EU-ASEAN cooperation, President Tusk was invited in 2017 as guest of the chair (Philippines), and efforts are underway to maintain this model with Singapore in 2018, as this country will also be in charge of EU-ASEAN relations. ASEAN's problem-solving capacity is being tested again: In Myanmar the treatment of Rohingyas is a very serious problem. The EU has been strongly involved in and supported the democratic transition in the country. However, the serious human rights violations creating a dramatic outflow of nearly 700,000 refugees to Bangladesh are destabilising the sub-region and endangering the success of an ambitious democracy-building project of the EU. The EU Foreign Affairs Council took a clear position in its Council conclusions on Myanmar/Burma of 26 February 2018: "The Council condemns ongoing widespread, systematic grave human rights violations committed by Myanmar/Burma military and security forces, including rape and killings. It also reiterates its condemnation of attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and other militant groups."¹⁸ Nevertheless, the fourth Myanmar-EU Human Rights Dialogue was held in Nay Pyi Taw on 5 March 2018, where the Myanmar authorities explained their views in response to the concern voiced by the Council.¹⁹

A regional rules-based framework would be a stabilising factor much needed in the present circumstances in Asia. Drawing on the EU's recognised experience, its success as an economic power and extensive experience in non-traditional security could contribute not only to the stability of the region but also beyond, as topics like cyber security, water, arable land, climate change, counter-terrorism or implementing the Maritime Security Strategy and its Work Plan, to name just a few examples, would have an impact beyond the region.

¹⁷ Asia Policy Institute (2017), "Preserving the Long Peace in Asia. The Institutional Building Blocks of Long-Term Regional Security."

¹⁸ "Council conclusions on Myanmar/Burma 6418/18," 26 February 2018, <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6418-2018-INIT/en/pdf>.

¹⁹ "Joint Press Release: Myanmar and the European Union hold 4th Human Rights Dialogue," 5 March 2018, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/41089/JOINT%20PRESS%20RELEASE:%20Myanmar%20and%20the%20European%20Union%20hold%204th%20Human%20Rights%20Dialogue.

Recognising the impact of geopolitics, the important roles played by the military in some countries, like the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in China, the evaluation of security (Korean peninsula), and the increasing spending on armaments, the EU is looking into establishing military-to-military contacts, for example, by making use of an additional diplomatic tool through an EU Military Staff which would complement and enhance links between EU Member States' military officers and third powers'. This is in line with the beefing up of security and defence policy²⁰ within the EU. The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PeSco) agreed in 2016 "against the magnitude of the security challenges Europe is confronted with now"²¹ is one of the tools. "PeSco...can generate common public goods also well beyond Europe,"²² which includes Asia. On 6 March 2018 the Council met for the first time in the PeSco format.²³

Developing existing strategic partnerships for cooperation not only in the region but also beyond in other continents like Africa and the Middle East could provide shared experiences of a common learning process which in turn could feed back positively into regional cooperation.

In pursuing multilateralism as a guiding principle of the international order a more active engagement based on a common policy by the EU is warranted—in addition to the other multilateral institutions like the WTO, World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Reforming these organizations to make them more resilient while including new institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to strengthen their multilateral character are in line with the policy of reforming the liberal order on which the present system is built and, important to recall, which has allowed aspiring powers to emerge. Part of this policy has to be the lending of support to regional initiatives like the trilateral cooperation on the Korean peninsula

²⁰ Marc Leonard and Marc Rötgen (2018), "A New Beginning for European Defence," ECFR Commentary, 14 February 2018, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_a_new_beginning_for_european_defence.

²¹ Daniel Flott, Antonio Missiroli and Thierry Tardy (2017), "Permanent Structured Cooperation: What's in a name?," European Institute for Security Studies, Paris, Chaillot Papers Nr. 142, November 2017, p. 53.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Foreign Affairs Council (Defence), 6 March 2018, https://www.parlementairemonitor.nl/9353000/1/j9tvqajcor7dxyk_j9vvij5epmj1ey0/vkrmfq1sagadm?ctx=vhshnf7snxu9&tab=1&start_tab1=5.

among China, South Korea and Japan, a weak plant requiring sunlight; processes like Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI);²⁴ and the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue for trust building. This includes the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and organisations in South Asia.

As the host of the 2018 ASEM Summit, the EU is interested in valorising the potential of this 22-year-old, 53-participants comprehensive bi-continental dialogue forum. Security and connectivity are two topical issues for discussion in this unique Asia-Europe set-up.

As foreseen, the various dialogue and political and strategic consultation fora²⁵ and meetings with Asian powers, in particular the ones with the four strategic partners, should serve as the base for a genuine policy dialogue and help to organise meaningful summits. Drawing on its foreign policy box as outlined in the EUGS, the EU and the Member States can enhance the common impact on these fora and influence decisions.

CONCLUSIONS

Being outside the comfort zone entails the risks that come from standing up for values and interests, as well as the potential to be in conflict with existing policies, priorities and values.²⁶ However, these are necessary ingredients for the foreign policy of a “grown-up” and will in the end contribute to the credibility of the EU.

The potential for disagreement with China on governance, human rights issues and economic issues is clearly there. Disagreements will also occur with like-minded countries with which the EU is in competition on trade, norms

²⁴ Michael Reiterer (2017), “Supporting NAPCI and Trilateral Cooperation: Prospects for Korea-EU Relations,” Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome, Working Papers 17/01, January 2017, p. 11, <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1701.pdf>, as well as in: Nicola Casarini (ed.), “Promoting Security Cooperation and Trust Building in North East Asia—The Role of the European Union,” IAI, Rome, 2017, pp. 183-193.

²⁵ Nicolò Casarini (2017), “How Can Europe Contribute to Northeast Asia’s Security?,” *The Diplomat*, 21 September 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/how-can-europe-contribute-to-northeast-asias-security/>.

²⁶ Michael Reiterer (2016), “Regional Security Architecture in the Asia-Pacific: What Role for the European Union?,” The ASAN Forum, Special Forum: Urgent Call for a Common Agenda between Europe and Asia, 30 June 2016, <http://www.theasanforum.org/regional-security-architecture-in-the-asia-pacific-what-role-for-the-eu/>.

and standards. These conflicts will have to be solved within a rules-based system, by fostering the rule of law and multilateralism, by stemming the pressures of nationalism and authoritarianism, and by rekindling trust and problem-solving capacity in democratic structures. The EU's credibility will depend on the extent to which it is prepared to stand up for this system in the face of pressure from all partners—mature relationships must be able to bear the brunt of criticism.

Given the budgetary and physical constraints and the importance of dealing like any other major power with its own neighbourhood, the setting of priorities and the attribution of sufficient time and means to them are necessary. Implementing a few priorities²⁷ on the global level, enriched by bilateral ones, will bring results and credibility as opposed to trying to do everything and to comment on everything.

Finally, I would like to make a strictly personal proposal: While others invest in arms and build artificial islands or other military bases, the EU could bundle its offers to Asia in setting up as a flagship project an “Academy for Diplomacy and the Rule of Law” in Asia and a related fund. Drawing on the professed EU experience within Europe and beyond, it could work with Asian partners to overcome the legacies of the past, build trust and cooperative structures, link experts in establishing networks of networks, foster governance, offer conflict prevention courses, get involved through experts in conflict mediation, and explain civil-military cooperation in post-conflict situations. Thereby the EU could live up to its promises in the sharing of best practices as well as know-how in regional and multilateral cooperation, conflict management and institutions building. Compared to the costs of tensions, arms race, and re-construction after upheavals and wars, this would be a small investment, fully in line with a values-based and comprehensive foreign policy, and would serve as testimony of turning words into deeds.

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²⁷ Michael Reiterer (2016), “Asia as part of the EU’s Global Strategy: Reflections on a more strategic approach,” in Olivia Gippner (ed.), *Changing Waters—Towards a new EU-Asia Strategy*, London School of Economics - Dahrendorf Forum, LSE Ideas, Special Report, April 2016, pp. 62-70, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/publications/reports/pdf/Changing-Waters-LSE-IDEAS.pdf>.