

# Security Cooperation in EU-China Relations

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## Abstract

Over the past decade, the EU and China have expanded their relations beyond a focus on economic and trade issues into the sphere of security. Security encompasses a variety of policy domains—from traditional, military security to non-traditional human security. The record of actual EU-China cooperation has been mixed across policy domains with distinct temporal trajectories. Our research question considers why security cooperation has advanced in certain policy domains while it has faltered in others. Based on expert survey of European and Chinese scholars, we contrast interest-driven and experience-driven explanations. The analysis identifies a number of events in EU-China cooperation that have been critical to initiate and enhance cooperation in specific domains. Overall, we argue that experience with actual cooperation, rather than declared intentions, best explains patterns of cooperation over time.

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## Introduction

What factors best explain cooperation between the European Union and the People Republic of China in matters of security? Even with evident variation over time as well as across security domains, the sheer amount of EU – China engagement and dialogues makes this a meaningful question. Here, our focus is on China relations with the EU rather than the individual member states even though we recognize that the latter continue to carry main responsibilities for their defense and security policies. However, even noting the limited room to maneuver given competing interests and actions of its member states, the EU has emerged as a relevant security actor with a distinct foreign and security policy (the Common Foreign and Security Policy, or CFSP) and a bureaucracy (the European External Action Service or EEAS) dedicated to promoting EU interests abroad.

We also acknowledge that the immediacy of great power politics where the USA and China, as major actors, tend to draw attention away from the often more mundane interactions between China and the EU, but this doesn't necessarily make the latter less pertinent. It does, however, suggest limits to the value of applying traditional approaches and concepts, such as balancing and power-transition, to EU-China relations. The EU and China signed a 'strategic partnership' in 2003, and adopted a '2020 strategic agenda for cooperation' in 2013. These agreements resulted from a mutual commitment to cooperation and signal an interest to further advance ties.

So what may explain the willingness of the EU and China to act on some policies but not on others? In sharp contrast to the amount of studies focusing on USA – China relations, there is only limited scholarly interest in EU – China security relations (Bersick 2015). A first objective of this paper is to make an inventory of the amount of cooperation across a wide range of traditional and non-traditional security dimensions. Following Most and Starr (1989), opportunities and constraints are seen as structuring security cooperation. Hence, a second objective is to identify key opportunities and to evaluate how, if at all, they explain patterns of cooperation. We expect that opportunities for cooperation vary, and that actual collaboration faces more or less serious challenges. Finally, we reflect on how individual EU member states as well as global politics impose constraints on the development of EU – China security relations.

The EU and China have become major trade partners as well as significant investors in each other's economies. Apart from direct economic ties, the EU and China share an interest in an open, stable and good-functioning world economy. The spillover of shared economic interests into the security realm has commonly been cited as the main reason for security cooperation between the EU and China (Smith and Xie 2010). From this perspective economics not only determines the extent of security relations but also their particular nature. The EU – China Trade and Cooperation Agreement (CEU 1985) still provides the fundamental legal agreement between both sides. Accordingly, security dialogues are said to focus on economic security and protecting economic interests, and economic interests have acquired particular prominence given the absence of pressing security concerns. The EU and China do neither perceive each as enemies or potential military threats, nor does the 'rise of China' have an immediate impact on EU interests. Even when EU officials worry about the impact of a more assertive China—for example in the South-China sea—on security in East and South-east Asia, this does not necessarily mean that the EU has a meaningful role to play.

The willingness to cooperate results not only from shared interests but also from a common understanding of the problems at hand as well as appropriate and feasible solutions. Arguably, actual experiences with cooperation are particularly relevant in shaping the space for collaboration. By comparing security relations across domains as well as over time, we

evaluate the comparative relevance of interests and experience emphasizing learning and socialization as key elements for the diffusion of cooperation. Empirically, we evaluate security cooperation between 1989 and 2015<sup>1</sup> across ten policy dimensions, namely: military security, proliferation and nonproliferation, regional security, cyber-security, terrorism and organized crime, human security, civil protection, migration, climate change and energy security, and economic security. The EU – China strategic partnerships (2003, 2010) have shaped cooperation across all these dimensions—and contrast with events such as Tiananmen Square (1989) that burdened relations across the board. Other events had a much more specific impact; for example, the impact of EU assistance following the Wenchuan earthquake (2008) on civil protection.

The next section surveys existing theoretical approaches on EU – China security relations contrasting interest and experience based explanations and exploring implications for cooperation across dimensions and over-time. The third section outlines the framework of expert survey of European and Chinese scholars working together underlying the study. The fourth section presents the key results that are discussed further in the Conclusions.

### **Perspectives on Security Cooperation**

Existing literature provides two useful starting points to think about what motivates and constrains security cooperation between the EU and China. First of all, there are extensive scholarly debates within the field of International Relations about why states cooperate (Oye 1986). Here, interests, perceptions and institutions (Axelrod & Keohane 1986) provide useful organizing principles. Alternatively, EU – China relations can be seen as a special case of an emerging European foreign policy (Bersick 2015; Jørgensen et al. 2015). The latter literature tends to be more policy oriented and to follow either a constructivist or (historical) institutionalist approach with agencies and events shaping the evolution of cooperation.

Table 1 surveys the various ‘theoretical’ positions and conceptual contributions with regards to opportunities and constraints. Further, it applies these concepts to EU – China relation to highlight key variation across issue dimensions and time. Exogenously determined interests underlie both Realist and Liberal approaches where a narrow respectively broad definition of security interests is the key distinguishing factor. Constructivist approaches draw attention to the role of perception and agency in the formation of preferences. Institutionalism encompasses historical approaches highlighting path-dependency as well as neo-institutionalist approaches with an emphasis on the ability of institutions to address issue of distribution and monitoring compliance (Koremenos et al. 2001). The latter are more closely associated with Liberalism.

The Realist understanding of the international system emphasizes sovereignty and ‘self-help’ which leaves little room for bilateral cooperation in security matters. Cooperation is conditional on the presence of an immediate security threat – e.g., when facing a common enemy – or shared security interests in dealing with third parties – e.g., when providing personnel to UN peacekeeping operations. Accordingly, balancing and bandwagoning provide opportunities for cooperation. A key constraint is the risk of entanglement underscoring the potential costs of collaboration. Hence, cooperation is generally highly conditional, and issue and time specific. This will hold particularly when security collaboration becomes part of ‘high’ politics, for example, in case of cooperation on military and regional security, proliferation and nonproliferation, and international terrorism. Yet also in other areas threats towards the state may emerge, for example, around issues such as cyber- and human security, and if so security cooperation will remain weak. In ‘low’

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<sup>1</sup> The time period coincides with the EU developing a common foreign and security policy, and the agreement on China – EU strategic partnerships in 2003 and extended in 2010.

politics domains such as economic security, civil protection and climate policies, joint action is more feasible.

The delegation of authority from the member states to the EU is still limited which further constrains EU – China cooperation, but over time the authority of the EU versus its member states has increased. The increased economic and military capabilities of the China are even more striking. Whereas the former should be generally promote EU – China security cooperation simply because the EU has become a more relevant partner, the effects of the so-called ‘rise of China’ is more mixed. On the one hand, China has taken on a more prominent role in global security as shown in non-proliferation, peacekeeping, and climate change. At the same time, it is also increasingly challenging the status quo, for example, in the South-China Sea and in other regional security issues.

Liberals see possible mutual gains and opportunities for cooperation across the full security domain. Given increasing trade and investment flows, the Chinese and European economies have become increasingly interconnected, putting economic security central to the EU – China relations. Closer economic ties also affect other security domains; e.g., immigration but also increased risks of the spread of diseases such as H5NI (bird flu) linking economic security to civil protection. Because of their direct responsibility for the single European market, EU institutions have acquired broad responsibilities to act on such issues (Dorussen et al 2015, Kirchner et al 2015). Shared interest in a stable global order creates opportunities for collaboration on regional security (e.g., via the Asean Regional Forum, ARF) and nonproliferation. External events, such as the global financial crisis in 2009, brexit, and the possible radical change in US policy towards China under the Trump presidency, are likely to negatively affect opportunities for EU – China relations.

**Table 1 Approaches to EU – China Security Cooperation**

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Security Cooperation</i>		<i>Variation</i>	
	<i>Opportunity</i>	<i>Constraint</i>	<i>Issue</i>	<i>Temporal</i>
<b>Realist</b>	Balancing	Entanglement	High versus Low Politics	‘Rise of China’
<b>Liberal</b>	Common Interests	Democratic Norms	Issue specific from trade interest (high) to human rights (low)	Global Financial Crisis
<b>Constructivist</b>	Shared perception & Understanding / Normative power	Misunderstanding / Conceptual Gaps	Issue specific from global order to post-modern values	EU institutionalization / crisis.
<b>Institutionalist</b>	Density of institutional framework / structuring agreements	‘Lack of history’	of Policy institutional diffusion	/ Path dependency / critical junctures

Depending on the specific security issue under consideration, EU and Chinese interests may thus be more aligned making it easier to achieve collaboration, or more opposed making it harder to do so (Oye 1986). The EU and China, moreover, often do not share a common normative understanding of the global international order; for example, with respect to democracy and human rights. Such lack of trust and normative agreement are important constraints on the further development of EU – China security relations, but do not necessarily and always impede it. Neo-liberal intuitionism points at the relevance of institutions to provide linkages across issue domains. Institutions can also be designed to monitor and, if necessary, sanction agreements (Axelrod and Keohane 1986, Koremenos et al. 2001, Dorussen and Kirchner 2014). Accordingly, the increased involvement of the EU and China in bi- and multilateral agreements is seen as pertinent.

Also from a Constructivist perspective, opportunities for cooperation present themselves across the full domain of security issues. Rather than exogenously determined alignment of interests, for Constructivists the ability of actors to forge such an alignment matters (Kerr and Fei 2007). Differences between the perceptions and conceptual understanding of key elements for security collaboration (such as sovereignty, human rights) and international norms (such as Right to Protect) are seen as important constraints (Pan 2010, Gottwald and Duggan 2012), while the ability to overcome such differences presents valuable opportunities.

For the EU, its normative understanding is seen as particularly important for the ambitions of the EU to build security relationships with ‘other’ states including China. Smith and Xie (2010) argue that three core logics explain the EU interest in strategic partnerships. First, the *integration logic* suggests that the need for an external policy is a “spillover or the projection of internal needs” (435). The (dis)similarity of interests and preferences of the EU member states affect opportunities for advancing an common interest. Secondly, an *external logic* emphasizes the pressures and opportunities arising from broader international structures. Thirdly, the *identity logic* explains the search of strategic partnerships as “bound up with the search of a European identity, and thus with the generation of images and understandings of the EU itself, both within and outside the Union” (435). They conclude:

(...) the search for an EU China ‘strategic partnership’ reflects the perception in key EU institutions that the Union has a role in introducing China to the global order and ensuring that the Chinese play by the rules of global society (as interpreted by the EU). We should of course also note that this perception has often been met by an equally firm Chinese perception that they will do things their own way, and by their capacity to resist or reject the EU’s presumption. (Smith and Xie 2010: 444)

Differences in perceptions and the ability of key Chinese and EU actors to overcome such differences, or convergence, largely explain variation in opportunities for cooperation (Kirchner et al. 2016). Development (and crises) of EU institutions is seen as most pertinent for any temporal variation in efforts to achieve EU – China collaboration.

Since 2003, EU – China relations have become increasingly institutionalized. There are regular EU – China Summits and efforts to negotiate a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. From 2013 as part of the EU – China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation, negotiations have been held on a EU – China bilateral investment agreement. The prospects for a China – EU free trade agreement are being explored since 2012. Institutionalism emphasizes the opportunities the increased density of such agreements offer for future collaboration (Shambaugh 2004). Whereas initially dialogues and agreements focus on the most salient issues (in the case of EU – China primarily economic ties), cooperation is expected to diffuse to strategic and security domains – for example the High-Level Strategic

Dialogues within the 2020 Strategic Agenda. Studying EU – China engagement with peacekeeping, Cottey and Duggan (2016) argue that increased experience with collaboration on the ground has promoted security collaboration more generally.

In spite of the impressive network of EU – China interactions, there are clear limits to the development of security cooperation (Holslag 2011). First of all, there is a relative ‘lack of history’ in EU – China diplomatic relations; they exist only for about forty years and a strategic partnership only since 2003. The European External Action Service is also a very ‘young player’ internationally. Finally, there is a legacy of more problematic engagements: the 1989 events surrounding Tiananmen Square and the continuing European arms embargo against the PRC and the denial of market economy status for the PRC.

In summary, analyses of EU – China security cooperation can be distinguished between interest-driven (broadly Realist and Liberal) and experience-driven (broadly Constructivist and Institutionalist). A further distinction is between a narrowly conceived security agenda (in line with Realist and, less clearly, Institutionalist approaches) and a broad security agenda (Liberal and Constructivist). Table 2 outlines the expectations of these perspectives on the pattern and development of EU – China security relations. The classification identifies specific expectations for EU – China security cooperation across policy domains as well as its development of time, and will guide the empirical analysis in the following sections.

**Table 2 Classification of Expectations for EU – China Security Cooperation**

	Interest-driven	(Realist): limited opportunities for cooperation with increasing structural constraints limiting joint action	(Liberal): general opportunities for cooperation with issue specific variation in structural constraints supporting joint action
Temporal	Experience-drive	(Institutionalist): limited opportunities for cooperation, but increasing joint actions within specific domains	(Constructivist): general and opportunities for cooperation with joint action diffusing across domains
		Specific	Encompassing
		Security Domain	

### Research Design

We rely in our description and evaluation of EU – China security relations on an survey of European and Chinese scholars. These experts in specific security domains collaborated in their assessment.<sup>2</sup> As part of the EU funded research project *EU – China Security Cooperation*, we convened four workshops in 2014 and 2015 bringing together the experts

<sup>2</sup> In alphabetical order: Sebastian Bersick, Katja Biedenkopf, Yan Bo, Raphael Bossong, Nicola Casarini, Chou Meng-Hsuan, George Christou, Zhimin Chen, Thomas Diez, Els van Dongen, Han Dorussen, Simon Duke, Evangelos Fanoulis, Gustaaf Geeraerts, Sebastian Harnisch, HE Kai, Weiping Huang, Ling Jin, Harlan Koff, See Seng Tan, Wenwen Shen, Shen Yi, Eva Scherwitz, Leslie Holmes.

to discuss a common framework for analysis and to enhance cooperation between the European and Chinese scholars. Kirchner et al. (2016) provides a detailed description of the case studies.

The analysis covers a range of traditional and nontraditional security dimensions. The ten selected areas are: military security, regional security, nuclear proliferation, terrorism and organized crime, climate and energy security, human security, civil protection, cyber security, economic security, and migration and immigration. These dimensions are explicitly references in both Chinese official policy papers as well as key EU documents such as the 2003 European Security Strategy and its 2008 Implementation Report. The demarcation (and division of labor) between the various policy domains was agreed upon at the workshops.

In contrast with most existing studies, the focus of the analysis is on EU – China relations rather than ‘Sino-European’ security relations. Similarly, the focus is on direct EU – China relations instead of placing these relations in light of a third party – most commonly the USA or Russia, but also Africa as an ‘external’ region has received scholarly attention (Bates 2008, Chu and Chen 2011, Jacobson and Wood 2012, Shambaugh 2005). The choice was mainly made to be able to assess the role (or lack thereof) as the EU as a security actor, and the relevance of EU – China relations in their own right rather than derivative from a US (or Russia) centered perspective. At the same time, we obviously recognize the independent role of key European states, in particular, the UK, Germany and France, and as well as the internal EU decision-making procedures. We are also aware of the relevance of global, great power, politics as structuring EU – China relations. Experts were explicitly invited to comment on these aspects while keeping their focus on EU – China security relations.

For each of the dimensions, the experts were asked to identify threat perception as well as response. In first instance, assessments were made for the EU and China separately. Subsequently, the Chinese and European counterparts collaborated on their evaluation of the degree of convergence / divergence on threat perception and response between the EU and China. Convergence (or divergence) could apply both to the conceptual and normative understanding of the threat and policy response, but also to the actual content of policy responses. Experts were asked to rely on (and refer to) key official statements of the Chinese government and EU offices in their assessment. In other words, we rely on agreed policy rather than opinion of individual officials. Finally, the experts made an inventory of EU – China joint actions as evidence for cooperation at the bilateral as well as multilateral level.

The study relies on specific criteria to measure convergence and cooperation as the key concepts in the analysis. *Convergence* is assessed by (i) the extent to which uniform positions exist within the EU and China on the perception of threat and relevant response, and (ii) the extent of (dis)agreement on underlying principles such as sovereignty and (non)intervention. Rather than emphasizing constant opportunities and constraints, which would lead to a largely static assessment, scholars were asked to explore developments over time. This more dynamic approach aims to investigate whether any argument for convergence has either weakened or strengthened, and whether opportunities for cooperation have expanded, restricted or simply shifted. *Cooperation* is assessed on the basis of three principles: (i) progress from intentions, to agreements, to joint actions, (ii) barriers to cooperation both internal, such as sovereignty, as well as external, e.g., the role of third parties such as the USA, and (iii) whether collaboration is in line with converging perception of threat and response. To summarize the rich information found in the various case studies, we proposed a simple categorization of convergence in threat perception and policy response into ‘high’, ‘medium’ and ‘low’.

With regards to the way in which threats in a given issue domain are perceived on each side, the categorization is defined as follows:

- **High:** developments are regarded as a main or significant threat and associated with a high propensity to affect the peace and stability of the polity.
- **Medium:** developments are seen as a threat but not involving a high propensity to affect the peace and stability of the polity.
- **Low:** developments have received little, if any, attention as a threat.

However even in areas where the EU and China share similar perceptions of threats, they do not necessarily respond with the same policies. It is also possible that the EU and China do not give a similar priority or salience to implementing any policy responses. In order to measure convergence, we follow the following definitions for the categorization of levels of convergence between China and the EU:

- **High:** similar degrees of threat perception – as defined above – and high degree of overlap in relevant domestic response.
- **Medium:** either variation in the degree to which they perceive the level of threat in a particular issue domain or in how their domestic policies respond to these threats.
- **Low:** variation in the way they perceive the threat and in the extent or degree to which domestic actions have been introduced.

The objective is moreover to provide an aggregate view on the level of cooperation. With a focus on joint actions at either the bilateral or multilateral level, we operationalize degrees of cooperation as follows:

- **High:** both partners actively and frequently encourage joint actions, including the involvement of personnel or resources; no or little evidence of any clear barriers to joint actions.
- **Medium:** infrequent joint actions but a common understanding and recognition that problems can be solved jointly, including evidence of willingness to commit personnel and resources; some evidence that barriers impede the regularity of joint actions.
- **Low:** joint action is absent or occasional; cooperation takes place predominantly at the level of discourse or intention rather than practice; constraining factors present clear barriers.

Finally, we identify events that have shaped development in EU – China security relations in each of the ten dimension.

## Findings

THREAT PERCEPTION of the EU and China is summarized in Table 3. The table gives the expert assessment for the ten security dimensions focused on the period 2010 – 2015. It shows that there is considerable consistency in the way the EU and China officially rate threats across the different domains.

Both sides consider the threat level of terrorism / organized crime, proliferation and regional threats as high. This does not necessarily imply that they agree on the specific content of the threat. Obviously, the different neighborhoods of the EU and China lead to distinct threat perceptions in regional security. China is mainly occupied with East and South China Sea and the Korean peninsula, whereas Europe main concerns center on its eastern (Ukraine, the Baltics and Russia) and southern borders (North Africa and the Middle East, in particular Syria). Yet there is some geographic overlap: both China and the EU are increasingly concerned about the instability emanating from the Central Asia region (Diez et al. 2015, 42). Similarly, there is no immediate similarity in the source of terrorist threats; the EU is



mostly and increasingly concerned with Islamist radicals, while China main concern is with domestic terrorism. Bossong and Holmes (2016, 81) observe that “Chinese attempts to associate domestic terrorists, mainly Uighurs, with global Islamist terrorism have not generally been recognized by Western countries.” With regards to (non)proliferation, the EU and China share a concern with the programs of North Korea and Iran.

**Table 3 Comparison of Levels of Threat Perception in the EU and China**

<i>Security Dimension</i>	<i>EU threat perception</i>	<i>China threat perception</i>
Regional Security	High	High
Nonproliferation	High	High
Terrorism and organized crime	High	High
Climate change & energy security	High	High (energy) / Medium (climate)
Military security	High	Medium
Migration and immigration	High	Low
Civil protection	Medium	Medium
Cyber security	Medium	Medium
Economic security	Medium	Medium
Human security	Medium	Low

Source: Kirchner, Christiansen and Dorussen (2016: 231) compiled from data provided in the chapters of this edited volume.

Cyber security, civil protection and economic security are perceived to yield medium level threats by both sides. Here there is also considerable overlap in the perceived sources of the threat, namely the consequences of technological developments for economic and political stability. For the remaining dimensions – military security, human security, energy security and climate change – we observe more discrepancies in the official risk assessments. The EU is increasingly concerned that military posturing by Putin’s Russia reveals the limited European defense capabilities, while China is becoming more confident in its military strength. The various refugee crises have pushed immigration high on the EU agenda, while domestic migration and actual outward flow of Chinese migrants are only of limited concern for China. The EU perceives crises in governance and failed human security as a source of multiple threats (regional security, migration and terrorism). Chinese officials remain reluctant to subscribe to ‘Western’ notions of human security, while recognizing the consequences of state failure.

CONVERGENCE of domestic policy response between the EU and China is often limited. In some areas there is convergence in policy approach, for example, both the EU and China have financed large-scale investment programs to stimulate growth and to address any economic insecurities. In civil protection, China increasingly adopts a civilian-led and more devolved approach comparable with standard practices in the EU-area. At the same time, Chinese crisis management remains clearly more hierarchical with lack of ownership at the local level. For most areas, however, experts observe clear differences between Chinese and EU responses to security threats; most strikingly regarding cyber security.

The EU has a fundamentally different approach to cyber security to that of China, and also the United States and Russia, who follow a national security (threat) logic that favors deterrence and militarization, and thus hard cyber power. The EU focuses on soft cyber power – that is, building resilience to ensure rapid recovery from cyber attacks, building the necessary capacity to resist cyber attacks, and fighting cyber crime. (Bersick et al. 2016, 172)

Low levels of convergence are also observed with respect to terrorism and energy security even though both the EU and China perceive threats as high. As possible reasons for the discrepancy, experts mention value considerations such as sovereignty and non-intervention, and identity formation. Table 4 summarizes the levels of convergence on threat perception and policy response as well as the overall record of cooperation.

COOPERATION between the EU and China can be found across security domains. “Particularly noticeable is actual cooperation in key areas of traditional security, such as the joint antipiracy naval exercise off the coast of Somalia (the EU-led operation Atlanta) and the nuclear negotiations with Iran, which were chaired by the EU’s High Representative” (Kirchner et al. 2016, 234). Cooperation, however, is never sufficient frequent nor barrier-free to warrant a ‘high’ classification; for example, in the area of nuclear nonproliferation there is a marked contrast between cooperation on the Iran file and the North Korean situation where China allows the EU to play only a limited role.

In civil protection, the EU and China have increased bilateral cooperation following the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. This benchmark event prompted the EU-China Disaster Risk Management Project in 2012. The EU and China also both engage in the proceedings of the UN Office of Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR). In the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the EU publicly expressed appreciation of the China’s humanitarian support in Haiti. There is also cooperation through the activities of the Asean Regional Forum (linking to the regional security domain) and as part of increased Chinese involvement in peacekeeping (with obvious relevance for human security). Dorussen, Jin and Fanoulis (2016, 160) report that in March 2015, the Chinese navy evacuated, among others, European citizens from Yemen, providing an interesting connection to military security.

Regarding economic cooperation, “[t]opics arising in the bilateral trade and investment relationship are discussed in a number of specific dialogs, of which the EU-China High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue (HED) is especially important in terms of economic security” (Geeraerts and Huang 2016, 202). The G20 is also seen as the main forum to cooperate in responding to global economic challenges. China and the EU signed new agreement on customs cooperation in July 2014. Yet, these instances of active cooperation are somewhat marred by continued disagreement about China’s market economic status within the WTO.

In a number of security domains, cooperation is nearly exclusively at the level of discourse and joint statements with only occasional examples of practical cooperation. For example, EU – China cooperation on migration has seen some recent joint actions in the context of the dialog on EU – China Mobility and Migration in 2013, and EU-sponsored seminars in China led by the International Organization of Migration. FRONTEX has also been part of training and sharing best practice with China in combating human trafficking. Neither terrorism nor organized crime has been high on the agenda of the annual EU – China Summits. In comparison with the other strategic partners of the EU, Renard (2014) considers the level of cooperation on terrorism with China as the most limited. Nevertheless, Bossong and Holmes (2016, 90) note that “at technical levels, operational security cooperation is advancing”, for example, in joint customs operations which suggests a ‘medium’ level of joint action at least in the area of organized crime. In the area of cyber security, Bersick et al. (2016, 180) conclude that “(d)ifferent logics and cyber cultures have so far inhibited

meaningful bilateral and multilateral dialog and cooperation”. At the same time, they observe that the European Commission has been more pragmatic in its approach to Chinese cyber espionage activity when compared to the United States (Bersick et al. 2016, 181).

**Table 4 Comparison of Levels of Convergence and EU – China Cooperation**

<i>Security Dimension</i>	<i>Convergence of threat perception and policy response</i>	<i>Cooperation, joint actions at bilateral / multilateral level</i>
Nonproliferation	Medium	Medium
Civil protection	Medium	Medium
Economic security	Medium	Medium
Regional Security	Medium	Medium/Low
Climate change & energy security	Low/Medium	Medium
Military security	Low	Low/Medium
Human security	Low	Low/Medium
Terrorism and organized crime	Low	Low/Medium
Cyber security	Low	Low
Migration and immigration	Low	Low

Source: Adapted from Kirchner, Christiansen and Dorussen (2016: 236) compiled from data provided in the chapters of this edited volume.

For the security dimensions discussed so far, convergence of threat perception and policy response roughly matches the level of cooperation. This suggests that actual or perceived interests are indeed relevant for joint action. We observe discrepancies between convergence and cooperation on the remaining dimensions. On regional security, cooperation falls short of what may have been expected based on convergence. Regarding climate change, energy, military and human security, there are infrequent joint actions in spite of clear divergence of threat perception and policy response.

The EU’s 2015 Strategic Review and the 2017 Strategy for Central Asia emphasize cooperation and the desire to explore linkages with the Chinese-led Silk Road initiative. Other instances of active engagement on regional security take place in the context of the ARF and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Nevertheless, the EU and China present distinct and sometimes even competing models of regionalization. The very limited role of the EU in addressing increased Chinese maritime assertiveness in the East and South China accentuates that EU-Chinese cooperation in regional security is infrequent at best.

Some of the joint actions classified under civil protection or regional security could also serve as examples of joint actions under human security. However, the Chinese government would not necessarily accept these actions to fall under human security since it retains a contrasting perspective on the content and norms of the latter (for example, regarding individual versus collective rights and sovereignty versus right to protect).

Counter piracy has been the main area for military-to-military relations and joint actions. Duke and Wong (2016, 33) highlight the antipiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and the quarterly Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) meetings in Bahrain of the parties

involved in counter piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, the Horn of Africa and the Western Indian Ocean. There are also various on-going dialogs covering military security. At the same time, the ambitions of the EU to enhance transparency and cooperation, intensify military-to-military contacts and engage in high level security dialogue are not fully realized (Duke and Wong 2016, 28). Beijing however argues that the on-going arms embargo (implemented following the repression of the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989) is a hindrance to greater EU – China defense cooperation. Apart from its direct (but rather limited) effects, China views the arms embargo as relevant because “it has raised questions about the EU’s ability to maintain an independent position from the US and its ability to reach consensus among its members” (Duke and Wong 2016, 33). Bo et al. (2016, 114) argue that “(t)he EU and China have responded to climate security in different ways but with a converging trend.” This has resulted in joint actions at the bilateral level and increasingly the global level. Concrete joint actions have taken place in the field of “renewable energy, clean coal, biofuel and energy efficiency” (Bo et al. 2016, 115).

### **Conclusions**

In Table 2 we outlined four possible patterns for security cooperation emphasizing variation in joint actions over time and across issue domains. First of all, we note that there are instances of joint action in nearly all security domains. At the same time, only in a small number of security domains is there any regularity in the joint actions undertaken. There is little evidence to suggest that cooperation is restricted to ‘low’ or non-traditional security; for example, the EU and Chinese joint action on the Iran file is a clear instance of ‘high’ security politics. The EU and China have also acted jointly on humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, and joint customs operations. Possibly even more telling is that such joint actions, even in nontraditional security domains, commonly involve military-to-military relations. EU and Chinese maritime vessels have cooperated in fighting piracy and (military) peacekeeping forces have worked together in peacekeeping missions in South Sudan and Mali (Cottey and Duggan 2016).

Over the last decade, the EU and China have established an extensive network of dialogues. Since 2010 their strategic partnership includes foreign affairs, security matters and global challenges. Annual EU – China summits include discussions on security cooperation, and the 2012 summit encouraged regular dialog on defense and security policy. In a number of security domains, such as cyber security, migration and human security, fundamental normative differences persist and generally impede joint action. At the same time, increased Chinese ambitions and capacity to act as a global power have not constrained EU – Chinese cooperation. The EU shares American concerns about Chinese territorial claims in the East and South China seas, and may even be more aware of rapidly expanding Chinese economic interest in Africa, but these concerns have so far not thwarted joint action.

Despite its long history of integration, the EU remains composed of states with distinct foreign and defense policies. The 2009 Lisbon treaty led to the appointment of a High Representative for foreign and security policy and the creation of the European External Action Service, thus creating a bureaucracy to match the ambitions of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. Nevertheless a *common* policy does not imply a *single* policy, and individual member states have maintained their own links with China. In practice, the ability (or even willingness) of China to pursue a ‘divide and rule’ approach appears rather limited. Rather individual member states tend to promote an agreed EU stance in forums such as the G7 and UN Security Council where the EU’s institutional position is weak (Bo et al. 2016). Alternatively, initiatives from individual member states eventually become EU actions (Dorussen et al. 2016). The potential impact of the UK decision to leave the EU on the actual or perceived relevance of the EU in security matters falls outside the time period covered by our study.

The USA inevitably is the ‘elephant in the room’ in any bilateral China – EU relations given the strong security links between Europe and the USA, most importantly via NATO. The role of the EU and its member states in the Asia – Pacific is however quite limited. The Atlantic and Pacific are also rather loosely connected security regions (at least from a European perspective). This makes it feasible for the EU to engage with China across a range of different initiatives even when the USA raises concerns. An example is that most European states have become members of the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank against the explicit preference of Washington. On the other hand, the EU has not seen it opportune to lift the arms embargo against China. As with Brexit, the election of the Trump presidency and its possible impact on EU – China relations falls outside the scope of our study. If anything it makes China and the EU look as more predictable negotiating partners.

The evidence provided by the experts across the ten security dimensions suggests that the most accurate *pattern* of EU – Chinese cooperation is first of all one of responding to alignment of interests in specific areas, for example joint action on the Iran file, with regards to regional security in Central Asia, and customs cooperation to fight fraud and counterfeiting by organized crime. In line with the Liberal expectation, opportunities for cooperation exist across security domains, but issue specific variation in constraints determines particular joint action. Secondly, practical experiences with joint action have encouraged further collaboration in a number of security domains. Joint naval and peacekeeping operations have facilitated and diffused joint actions in military security, civil protection and, arguably, human security—even without a shared understanding on the latter. Telling examples are the evacuations of civilians from Libya and Yemen. Arguably, practical cooperation on renewable energy and energy efficiency between the EU and China has contributed to increased joint action on climate change and ultimate Chinese support for the 2016 Paris agreement on climate change. In line with Institutionalist expectations, even when opportunities for cooperation remain limited, there is evidence of increasing joint actions within specific domains.

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