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*edited by Marcin ZABOROWSKI*

## **Sino-European Strategic Dialogue**

24-25 September 2007, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris

The EU Institute for Security Studies and the Asia Centre co-hosted an event dedicated to the Sino-European dialogue on security on 24-25 September in Paris. The event was also supported by the China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The discussion was divided into the following four sessions:

- The roles of China and Europe in the changing world system with special emphasis on crisis prevention, crisis management, nation building and Sino-Japanese relations;
- The shared concerns between China and Europe, particularly with regard to proliferation, the Korean Peninsula, and stability and development in Africa;
- The Sino-European understanding in the area of security and the question of transparency in defence policies;
- Global security trends – dealing with the emerging multipolarity.

### **China and the EU – Ambivalent Perspectives**

The EU accepts and welcomes China's rise but it is apprehensive about its global and regional implications. China's rise is changing the balance of power in Eastern and Southern Asia and China is emerging as one of the main actors in Africa and (to a lesser extent) in the Middle East, where it seeks to gain access to energy resources. These developments are viewed by the Europeans with some ambivalence, which is fostered by China's reluctance to disclose its intentions and the extent of its global ambitions as well as its unclear attitude towards multilateralism. The Chinese speakers routinely confused multilateralism with multipolarity, which suggests that China tends to perceive multilateralism as a tool for containing the influence of the United States.

In recent years Sino-European co-operation in trade and at the level of political dialogue has grown dynamically, although not without controversy. On the other hand, co-operation in promoting peace and stability in other parts of the world remains far from satisfactory. On the whole the Europeans are frustrated with the continuing gap between lofty declarations and actual political practice. The intention of this conference was to address this gap by putting some practical issues on the table. The questions that were discussed in this context were: defence policies, the Korean Peninsula, and development aid and stability in Africa.

## **Defence Policy**

China's defence policy remains regionally focused. However, its gradual integration into the world economy has also induced incentives for Beijing to become more active in global security. The discussion focused here on the following issues:

- *Different views on defence and security* – China has, partly due to years of conflicts around its borders, a traditional view of security. Although it is beginning to share some of the EU's concerns about terrorism, proliferation and crisis management, China remains preoccupied first and foremost with its territory. Importantly, however, China's definition of what constitutes its territory is expansive as it includes Taiwan.
- *The principle of non-interference* – The principle of non-interference is the cornerstone of China's foreign policy. China is progressively increasing its contributions to UN operations. However, China remains strictly opposed to military interventions without a UN mandate. China is keen to strengthen its economic presence in Africa but it does not promote good governance there.
- *Need for coordinated actions* – Currently, both the European and Chinese troops contribute to various civilian and military missions around the world, which should open up scope for co-operation. However, co-operation between the EU and China remains constrained by differences in values, perceptions and views on the legitimacy of using military force.
- *Transparency* – China's defence policy is criticised for being notoriously untransparent both in terms of its security objectives and intentions as well as with regard to defence spending. The Chinese participants justified this lack of transparency by the need to remain alert *vis-à-vis* the American security posture in the region and especially in the Taiwanese Strait.
- *ESDP* – the Chinese showed their interest in ESDP but argued that it is a crisis management policy and as such it reflects different security priorities of China and Europe. China's security posture remains defensive or focused on the Taiwanese scenario. The key security challenges as identified in the European Security Strategy (terrorism, WMD proliferation and failing states) remain of much lesser concern for the Chinese.

The Chinese agreed that Beijing should take a bigger share of responsibility for managing global stability – this was welcomed by the European participants. While it is obvious that the challenges facing China and the EU are different, several speakers highlighted some scope for co-operation, especially in Africa. Chinese speakers pointed out that Beijing defence spending is modest and as such that it is limiting China's ability to engage in overseas missions. This argument was, however, greeted with scepticism by the Europeans who stressed that China's defence budget is notoriously understated.

### **Countering Proliferation and the Korean Peninsula**

No one seems to know exactly how far the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has advanced with its nuclear programme (see EUISS analysis by Marcin Zaborowski, 'North Korea Goes Nuclear: Global Reactions and the EU', October 2006). Due to its prominence in the region and its geographical location, China plays a role in the Korean Peninsula that cannot be compared to that of the EU. On the other hand, the EU is a player which through its experience in overcoming competitive nationalisms and promoting reconciliation could serve as a potential source of inspiration for the conflicted East Asia region. The debate during the seminar focused on the following issues:

- *The EU's role on the Korean Peninsula* – The EU is not included in the six-party talks, which imposes obvious limitations on its influence in the region. However, the EU is an important contributor of humanitarian aid to DPRK and it has an interest in peace and stability in the region. On the question of what the EU could do in the region, the view prevailed that the EU should act as a supporter of reconciliation, regional co-operation, nuclear disarmament and economic development. There was no enthusiasm for the idea of the EU joining the six-party talks, with some participants suggesting that its neutral status in the Korean Peninsula can give the EU potential leverage in the future.
- *China's role on the Korean Peninsula* – China's influence in the peninsula is pivotal. China wants a stable Korean Peninsula: it fears the consequences of the breakdown of the Pyongyang regime and the already accelerating migration from the DPRK. But despite its prominent role China does not have a quick solution to six-party talks. According to China, the process needs more time and is unlikely to be completed in 2008, as is currently scheduled. Some Chinese participants also argued that as long as the talks continue China has some leverage *vis-à-vis* the US with regard to the Taiwanese question, hence a quick solution to the problem may not actually be in Beijing's interest. Moreover, these talks boost China's status as the major regional power. China's attachment to the principle of non-interference was recalled with regard to the sanctions question. However, China accepts that sanctions might be imposed in response to missile or nuclear tests by the DPRK.
- *The US's role on the peninsula* – The Chinese criticised some aspects of American diplomacy *vis-à-vis* the DPRK. However, the prevailing view was that the US remains committed to pursuing a diplomatic solution.

## Development and Stability in Africa

European powers have been the main external actors in Africa during the last few decades. However, China's emergence as a major power has enabled it to undertake important initiatives in Africa and thereby increase its significance not only on the continent, but also globally. The following issues were addressed in the context of the debate on Africa:

- *Different priorities* – One of the most remarkable distinctions between Chinese and European views on Africa stems from the different ideas regarding state building. According to China, most of the ongoing conflicts in the world today are due to underdevelopment and the lack of education. Therefore, China believes that economic development must be prioritised before democracy. As one of the speakers put it, 'China believes that economic development is more important than organising elections'. The European view, on the other hand, stressed the significance of democracy, good governance, human rights, freedom of the press and economic development as indispensable for the success of the stabilisation process. Some speakers described China's approach as trying to externalise its internal politics, namely a mixture of repressive policies and the pursuit of economic development.
- *Chinese private firms in Africa and the need for regulations* – China has been much criticised lately for the way its private enterprises are conducting their activities in Africa. Rule of law, corporate social responsibility and institution building are issues with which Chinese officials are being confronted more and more. Most speakers acknowledged this fact and pointed out the importance of introducing proper laws and regulations on Chinese firms' operations abroad, and especially in Africa. However, the difficulty of enforcing these laws was also mentioned, since Chinese firms are less willing, compared to their European counterparts, to adopt corporate social responsibility.
- *How to approach Africa* – Through development aid, the EU has for several decades tried to help Africa out of poverty and combat the challenges of instability. The results are, however, mixed at best. Some speakers proposed that China should develop a new strategic thinking on Africa and help it to realise its economic potential mainly through the presence of private firms and projects on energy and infrastructure. According to one speaker, the main difference between China and the EU is that the former views Africa as an opportunity, while the latter considers it to be a burden. Moreover, the fact that China, despite still being a developing country, has managed to become a major player motivates African countries to engage in closer cooperation with China as they aspire to replicate the Chinese success.

## Summary

The following three themes recurred throughout the seminar.

- *China should take more responsibility for global stability* – For example, until now China's Africa policy has been driven mainly, if not exclusively, by economic considerations. The Chinese have recently begun to realise that their economic interests may be endangered by political instability in the African continent. Nevertheless Beijing remains reluctant to promote good governance in Africa.
- *China-EU co-operation in other parts of the world* – When China engages in global problems, it often finds itself in the neighbourhoods (the Middle East, Iran and Africa for example) of the EU. The Chinese recognise that there is a need to co-operate with the Europeans in those parts of the world. However, China also sees Europe as a competitor and it often plays the post-colonial card whilst portraying itself as the champion of the developing world.
- *Multipolarity and the role of Europe* – Emerging powers are reshaping the world. A new global deal reflecting these realities is needed. According to the Chinese, Europe is and should remain a civilian power and a promoter of multilateralism. However, the Chinese also tend to see Europe as no more than a regional player. This contrasts sharply with their perception of the US – seen from Beijing as the only truly global player – and as such worth the special attention of China.

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