



Making EU strategic partnerships effective

GIOVANNI GREVI

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GIOVANNI GREVI

Senior Researcher at FRIDE

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Goya, 5-7, Pasaje 2º. 28001 Madrid – SPAIN

Tel.: +34 912 44 47 40 – Fax: +34 912 44 47 41

Email: fride@fride.org

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»» The conclusions of the European Council held on 16 September 2010 have placed the so-called ‘strategic partnerships with key players in the world’ at the forefront of the EU foreign policy debate. The document is both a sign of the times, and a counter-cyclical statement. A sign of the times, because it reflects the decisive role of a range of rising and established powers in the management, or mishandling, of common challenges, and the consequent need to engage with them more effectively. A counter-cyclical statement, because it asserts the enduring centrality of the Union in an increasingly competitive international system, implicitly rejecting the growing tide of arguments and some evidence to the contrary. Success in countering this trend lies, however, not in words but in deeds – that is, in the implementation of the European Council mandate to improve the performance of the Union in its relations with major global players.

The European Council has mandated High Representative Catherine Ashton, in coordination with the Commission and the Foreign Affairs Council, to evaluate prospects for relations with all strategic partners and deliver to heads of state and government a first progress report on this work in December 2010. EU leaders and institutions should approach strategic partnerships in a smart way that builds on the distinctive features of the Union and connects bilateral relations with multilateral frameworks.

This paper offers a framework to help develop a more effective and coherent approach to EU strategic partnerships. It is the first contribution in a series that will include specific assessments of EU bilateral partnerships, and recommendations on how to bring them forward, along the guidelines suggested here. The argument is divided into three main parts. To start with, the case is made for the role and purpose of the EU as a power centre in a polycentric world, and as a partnership entrepreneur. Further to that, the six main components of a long-term EU strategy for effective partnerships are sketched out, with particular reference to large emerging powers. The third part of this paper addresses the internal EU framework where strategic partnerships are assembled and includes some proposals to improve the performance of the Union. A quick mapping of EU strategic partnerships and some clarification of this rather blurred concept provide the background to the current debate.

EU partnerships: strategic by definition?

» Strategic partnerships are a political category that no EU document or statement clearly defines. The question is whether this is a problem *per se*. Looking back at the rather inconsistent language and practice of the Union provides insights into the priorities ahead. The 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) acknowledged the need to pursue the EU's objectives 'both through multilateral cooperation in international organisations and through partnerships with key actors'. In this context, six countries were mentioned: the US, with the transatlantic relationship deemed 'irreplaceable'; Russia, 'a major factor in our security and prosperity'; and finally, Japan, China, Canada and India were listed as countries with which 'we should look to develop strategic partnerships'. The list was not a closed one, as strategic partnerships could be developed 'with all those that share our goals and values, and are prepared to act in their support'. Notably, the ESS looked at strategic partnerships as something to aim for and achieve, and not as a consolidated tool of EU foreign policy.

The 2008 report on the implementation of the ESS distinctively framed partnerships as instruments to pursue effective multilateralism. Somewhat confusingly, however, it mixed partnerships with multilateral institutions, with regional bodies and with individual actors, without reference to criteria for reconciling these different levels of engagement. Again, the report singled out the US as 'the key partner' for Europe. However, it only described the state of play in relations with other main partners in a summary way: 'We have substantially expanded our relationship with China. Ties to Canada and Japan are close and longstanding. Russia remains an important partner on global issues. There is still room to do more in our relationship with India. Relations with other partners, including Brazil, South Africa and, within Europe, Norway and Switzerland, have grown in significance since 2003.'

A recent review of EU strategic partnerships has pointed out that the EU loosely defines as 'strategic' its relations with nine rather heterogeneous countries, namely Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa and the US.¹ However, only some of those are formally referred to as strategic partners in official documents (as opposed to occasional statements). The conclusions of the September European Council, while focusing on strategic partnerships, have also refrained from pointing out who the EU's strategic partners are. Arguably, that was wise.

Partnerships do not become strategic by virtue of defining them as such. The debate on who is a strategic partner and who is not is a circular one and the practice of attributing such political status is quite inconsistent. Both the 'strategic' quality and the 'partnership' nature of relations with individual countries are often questioned. It has been rightly

1. T. Renard, 'Strategy Wanted: The European Union and Strategic Partnerships', Security Policy Brief 13, Egmont (Royal Institute for International Relations), September 2010.

noted that ‘the nine strategic partnerships are neither identical nor equal’.² Instead, the EU should identify what its main interests and objectives are and consider strategic those partnerships that tangibly help it advance or achieve them.

Strategic partnerships are those that both parties regard as essential to achieve their basic goals. This is because the cooperation of strategic partners can lead to win-win games and, conversely, because such partners are those who could inflict most harm to one another were relations to turn sour.

Strategic partnerships are therefore important bilateral means to pursue core goals. As such, they may concern pivotal global but also regional actors. What matters is that they deliver. The three overarching objectives outlined by the ESS – addressing security threats, building a secure and well-governed neighbourhood, and promoting effective multilateralism – remain of course central, but require sharpening and updating. Issues related to climate change, energy security and, more broadly, the preservation of global commons have been stressed in the 2008 ESS implementation report. In the post-financial crisis world of sluggish growth and austerity in Europe and global economic imbalances, the protection of the economic interests of the EU via both multilateral and bilateral means is a pressing priority. An output-oriented definition of strategic partnerships advises against rigid listings, but suggests some common sense criteria to assess the strategic relevance of the relations with some of the EU’s partners.

By all standards, the US stands in a league of its own as *the* essential strategic partner because of its unparalleled global influence; the tight web of political, security, economic and social connections that link it to Europe; and the normative affinity between the two partners. Relations with China cannot but take high, and growing, strategic relevance because of the country’s worldwide economic and political outreach and its deepening economic and financial interconnection with the EU. Russia is a vital strategic interlocutor of the Union given its geographic proximity; its influence in the common neighbourhood but also in critical theatres such as Iran and Afghanistan; and the energy interdependence that binds it to Europe. With reference to the broad set of EU strategic objectives, although less so in purely economic terms, India and Brazil are moving quite fast to achieve for the EU a level of strategic relevance approaching that of China and Russia. The geopolitical outlook of these two large democracies remains essentially regional, but their clout in multilateral negotiations, from trade to climate change and in the context of the G20, has increased steadily. The EU shares basic values and key interests with Japan, a major economic power committed to cooperative solutions to global and regional challenges.

Given the EU’s worldwide interests and fundamental ambition to shape a functioning multilateral order, relations with these six countries no doubt assume a distinctive strategic value. However, when transposing EU strategic objectives at the regional level or focusing on more specific policy areas, such as for example crisis prevention and management, a broader range of partners stands out. Strong, strategic relations with not only Canada, Mexico and South Africa but also, among other countries, Indonesia, Nigeria and Pakistan are key to address issues of pressing concern to the EU. That said, the purpose here is not



2. Ibit, p. 2.

to draw rankings but to take a more result-oriented approach to relations with important partners, which are strategic because they are essential for the achievement of EU goals.

Defining such goals requires permanent updating and fine-tuning to the accelerating pace of change in the international system. The starting point in devising *effective* EU strategic partnerships is a comprehensive and, possibly, shared assessment of the complex and evolving global context that they are supposed to fit.

The transition to an unknown destination

»» The European Council stated in September 2010 that the economic and financial crisis has shown to what extent ‘the well-being, security and quality of life of Europeans depend on external developments’. To be sure, such developments are of concern.

Things have not quite gone by the book for the EU in the last troubled decade. The post-Cold War allegedly flat world of seamless connections, globalised exchanges and multilateral cooperation has turned out to be much more turbulent than some expected. Two basic trends are at work, namely the shift of wealth and political influence to emerging powers that assert their interests and narratives, and the deepening of interdependence. Somewhat paradoxically, the rise (or resurgence) of new powers in international affairs intensifies their interdependence at the same time as it creates frictions that could ultimately undermine the stability and openness of the international system itself.

The Union sits uncomfortably in the midst of these countervailing trends. The EU is both a prototype and a manager of interdependence. Oftentimes, it has played a leading role in building multilateral frameworks to address common problems, such as the Kyoto Protocol. Yet the EU has so far struggled to adjust to trends pointing towards a multipolar world of power balance and geopolitical competition because it is not a unitary actor as individual states are. However, the interplay between power shifts and interdependence will generate unpredictable outcomes. Several factors can be pinpointed that suggest, alternatively, a drift towards rivalry or scope for cooperation. The world came together in 2008 to respond to the financial and economic crisis in a coordinated fashion, only to slip towards a currency clash in 2010. The US and Russia were at loggerheads over the conflict in Georgia in 2008, only to ‘reset’ their relations in 2009, sign a new START treaty, agree a new package of sanctions against Iran and envisage to cooperate on missile defence at the recent NATO summit. In short, no pattern is cast in stone although, over the last year, pointers of future economic and political instability have prevailed over prospects for convergence between major global actors.³

3. G. Rachman, ‘End of the world as we knew it’, *The Financial Times*, 23-24 October 2010.

This is where EU strategic partnerships fit the current transition of the international system from Western hegemony to an unprecedented configuration of power and influence.

For the EU, engaging with major global actors serves a twofold purpose: firstly, protecting and advancing the interests and values of the European Union through a permanent balancing act with those of third countries; and secondly, averting a scenario of conflict-prone multipolarity and facilitating the transition of the international system to an 'interpolar' world.

In an interpolar world, interdependence and power intersect in multiple ways, engendering inevitable instability but also the incremental convergence of the strategic priorities of major powers.⁴ An interpolar scenario is not based on an instinctive 'we' feeling or on deep-rooted shared values among large international actors, but on a balanced appraisal of their strategic calculus. The basic insight is that with growing risks threatening their security and prosperity, as well as those of the fragile regions where they invest, major powers ultimately share more than what divides them. It is about needing each other more than loving each other. But needs are a workable basis for cooperation and the habit of cooperation can foster better mutual understanding. However, an interpolar world will not come about by the force of inertia; it will take strong commitment in the face of powerful unilateralist, protectionist and beggar-thy-neighbour temptations.

The current international system is one where power is spread across a variety of state and non-state actors as well as international bodies, but pivotal countries hold unique potential to make or break international cooperation. Bilateral relations and partnerships between 'systemic' countries – those that can make a difference to collective action at the global or regional level – therefore take centre stage in international affairs. However, these partnerships cannot thrive and deliver in isolation from other levels and formats of cooperation.

There is no overriding G2 in contemporary international relations. No exclusive 'couple' of powers is sufficient to fix global challenges (financial stability, climate change, energy security, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism) and therefore ensure the lasting protection of the strategic interests of the two parties, let alone of other countries. Minilateral groups, including those countries whose engagement is critical to the solution of shared problems, may offer a more promising format to devise new initiatives and submit them to larger multilateral fora, or take action.⁵ Examples include the G20 on global economic governance and the Major Economies Forum on climate change issues.

In fact, more large countries matter to preserving an open and stable international system today than at any time since World War Two. And most of them are pursuing a multi-vectoral foreign policy, hedging against one another but also exploring options for cooperation with a variety of partners.

In such a complex, multi-level environment, embracing strategic partnership should not detract from pursuing one's interests and multilateral dialogue in different formats. Effective partnerships are bilateral relations that should contribute to bridging over various levels of cooperation.



4. G. Grevi, 'The Interpolar world. A new scenario', Occasional Paper 79, EU Institute for Security Studies, June 2009.

5. Managing Global Insecurity Project, 'A Plan for Action', September 2008, p.20; R. Penttilä, 'Multilateralism light. The rise of informal international governance', EU2020 Essay, Centre for European Reform, July 2009; M. Naim, 'Minilateralism. The magic number to get real international action', *Foreign Policy*, July/August 2009.

An investment opportunity for the EU

»» According to the European Council, as it grows into an effective global actor, the Union ‘can draw on its firmly-rooted belief in effective multilateralism, especially the role of the UN, universal values, an open world economy and on its unique range of instruments.’ In reading the September conclusions, amidst the new emphasis on strategic partnerships, such reference to the traditional commitment of the Union to pursue effective multilateralism looks somewhat less persuasive than in the past. A sort of ‘Doha syndrome’ seems to be creeping into the EU approach to international affairs. As bilateral and regional trade deals proliferate while a new global multilateral agreement is moribund, so in political terms there is a mounting feeling that relations between key states would compensate for outdated or inadequate multilateral structures. However, bilateral partnerships and multilateral frameworks should be seen as connected and not as alternative levels of engagement in building a new international order.

The EU should reconcile itself with the reality of great power politics without resigning itself to its ‘immutable’ logic, but rather operating to shape a cooperative international system. Refraining from this would deprive the Union of its core purpose in the decades to come – building a rule-based, open and stable international system. It would also undermine its particular interests and those of its member states – all of them micro, small or medium (with a strong chance of becoming smaller) international actors – and pave the way for the marginalisation of the Union in the eyes not only of global partners but also of its citizens.

The state of global governance, like that of the international system, is fluid. Emerging powers are finding their way in international affairs while dealing with massive domestic problems. The very dynamism of rising powers shakes the multilateral architecture built by the West in the last decades. However, they have not consistently expressed or pursued an alternative master plan to that order. They have not set up an alternative ‘cartel’. Most pursue an *à la carte* approach to multilateral engagements and privilege traditional forms of inter-state cooperation that do not affect national sovereignty.⁶ In fact, their positions are pragmatic and their alignment very much depends on the issues at stake.

As to the normative dimension of global governance, a ‘disconnect’ has been noted between the EU and some rising powers.⁷ Their emergence challenges the assumption that liberal democracy and the free market economy would expand worldwide on the heels of economic globalisation. Perhaps, that assumption was a little far-fetched to begin with and needs to be projected over a longer timeframe than a handful of years. The demand for good governance

6. ‘Global Governance 2025. At a critical Juncture’, US National Intelligence Council, EU Institute for Security Studies, September 2010, pp. 10-14.

7. J. Holslag, ‘Europe’s normative disconnect with the emerging powers’, Asia Paper 5(4), Brussels Institute of Contemporary China Studies, 2010. For a focus on EU human rights policy and its record in the context of the UN, see R. Gowan and F. Brantner, ‘A Global Force for Human Rights? An Audit of European Power at the UN’, Policy Paper, European Council on Foreign Relations, September 2008.

and democracy remains widespread. Whether these core values will maintain their attraction will depend as much on the behaviour of rising powers as on the leadership by example, consistency and effective policies of their supporters.⁸

On the other hand, most rising powers are not in denial when it comes to the major economic, environmental and security challenges of interdependence, because they are already (often reluctant) stakeholders of the international system in the making. Clearly, they often feature different approaches to what is fair and equitable in international burden-sharing. On that basis, a difficult but essential dialogue with emerging powers should be fostered, for example, on issues such as sustainable development and human security, and on the best practice to achieve these goals through a variety of policy tools.⁹

This is not a global context that forces the EU to retrench but one that calls for its initiative and outreach to forge a new match between power and governance. The market for global governance innovation is a competitive one. But anticipation and risk-taking can be rewarded by high returns on investment.

Innovation in global governance consists of linking up different levels and formats of cooperation and maximising their comparative advantages. The EU should perform as a venture capitalist and invest in the market of governance innovation. Strategic partnerships should be one of its flagship start-ups.

In order to perform as a partnership entrepreneur, however, the EU needs to be acknowledged by third countries as a strategic partner in its own right. This is not a given.

The EU as a strategic partner

»» The European Council ‘agreed on the need for Europe to promote its interests and values more assertively and in a spirit of reciprocity and mutual benefit.’ It is worth noting that the term ‘assertive’ was not used in the 2003 ESS whereas it is mentioned twice in the conclusions of the September summit. The question is whether the more assertive language will translate into more effective action. There is a consensus among observers and policy-makers that the first big post-European Council test, namely the EU-China summit in early October, was not encouraging from this standpoint. One would hope that the level of assertiveness in the discourse is not inversely proportional to the level of political cohesion within the Union.

8. R. Youngs (ed.), *The European Union and Democracy Promotion. A Critical Global Assessment*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.

9. For a range of insights and suggestions on dialogue with strategic partners on the challenges of security and interdependence, see G. Grevi and A. de Vasconcelos (eds.), ‘Partnerships for effective multilateralism. EU relations with Brazil, China, India and Russia’, Chaillot Paper 109, EU Institute for Security Studies, May 2008; and L. Peral (ed.), ‘Global security in a multipolar world’, Chaillot Paper 118, EU Institute for Security Studies, October 2009.

As it embarks on re-launching its strategic partnerships, the EU enters the tough business of bilateral relations. Traditionally, this is what states do and foreign policy is about. In the case of partnerships (or alliances) meant, or expected, to have an impact beyond the regional level, this has been a matter for great powers. Strategic partnerships put a premium on the features of statehood, notably the capacity and authority to speak, commit, mobilise resources and deliver. Strategic partnerships are also comprehensive ones, and not fragmented depending on whether economic, political or security issues are concerned, because the vital interests of the parties span across these different domains.

These requirements set a tall order for the EU. The Union can exert considerable influence on the global stage but, of course, it is not a state, nor does it intend to become one. Because of its complex institutional arrangements, which mirror the sometimes awkward compromises achieved by its member states, the power to act (competence) of the Union on the international stage is fragmented and its representation is uneven in different international fora – hence it has been defined as a ‘patchwork’ power.¹⁰ Even where the EU has competence, it can really make an impact only when its member states agree to confer on it a strong mandate and, where relevant, support it by contributing diplomatic pressure or other measures. In a world where states remain the predominant, although by no means the sole, centre of decision-making, it cannot be taken for granted that the EU is regarded as a strategic partner.

Strategic partnerships require unity of purpose, focus, sometimes hard bargaining, a flexible negotiating posture and always political authority. It is fair to say that today’s pivotal countries, whether established or rising powers, question whether the EU is endowed with these attributes, except on some trade issues.

Among the most frequent allegations brought to question the strategic ambitions or, even, nature of the EU are its internal divisions and lack of political cohesion, its growing introversion, the opacity of its institutional arrangements, the internal constraints that delimit its capacity to craft workable trade-offs and its lack of clout to deal with geopolitical instability beyond its neighbourhood.¹¹ Sadly for the supporters of a stronger global role for the Union, these questions have been intensifying at the same time as the Union strives to set up the new foreign policy machinery provided for under the Lisbon Treaty.

That said, the effective management of strategic partnerships is far from being an EU problem only. It suffices to look at the ups and downs of, for example, the US-China or US-Russia relations, for how wrapped they are in high-sounding strategic rhetoric. As US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns noted last year, ‘partnership is an easy slogan but an exceedingly difficult task to carry out in practice’. He added, ‘When it comes to building partnerships, ignoring history makes it much less likely that we will manage to overcome it’.¹² The point is that both established and emerging powers are trying to build a new compass to navigate the deep, uncharted waters of interdependence just as power shifts make waves that

10. S. Gstöhl, ‘Patchwork power Europe. The EU’s representation in international organisations’, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 14(3) 2009, pp. 385-403; M. Emerson and P.M. Kaczyński, ‘Looking afresh at the external representation of the EU in the international arena’, Policy Brief 212, Centre for European Policy Studies, July 2010.

11. C. Grant, ‘Is Europe doomed to fail as a power?’, Essay, Centre for European Reform, July 2009; R. Haass, ‘A waning Europe matters less to America’, *The Financial Times*, 13 May 2010; P. Stephens, ‘Europe heads for Japanese irrelevance’, *The Financial Times*, 9 September 2010; R. Youngs, *Europe’s Decline and Fall. The Struggle Against Global Irrelevance* (Profile Books, 2010).

12. W.J. Burns, ‘The Practice of Partnership’, 2009 Cyril Foster Lecture, Oxford University, 26 November 2009.

force all actors to permanently adjust their route. The EU is right to invest political capital and adequate resources in strategic partnerships, but there is a need to manage expectations as to what these can deliver, notably over the short term.

Not only do more states matter, but they are more heterogeneous because their historical experiences and domestic socio-economic priorities are diverse. This eludes quick fixes and requires permanent mutual adjustment, patience and sensitivity to the concerns of others. Several countries feel ‘exceptional’ in their own way.

While some relationships involving the US and other centres of global power may be troubled, few would question their actual strategic value. Instead, the EU must build its credentials as a truly strategic partner and devise a long-term strategy to build effective partnerships.

An EU strategy for effective partnerships

»» The European Council has called upon the EU and its member states to ‘act more strategically so as to bring Europe’s true weight to bear internationally. This requires a clear identification of its strategic interests and objectives at a given moment and a focused reflection on the means to pursue them more assertively.’ For the EU, an effective, long-term approach to bilateral partnerships entails six principal components. These are complementary dimensions of the evolution of the EU into a fully-fledged global actor. While having broader relevance, the following recommendations are outlined with particular reference to EU relations with the four major emerging or re-emerging global actors, namely China, Russia, India and Brazil. Of course, not all of these guidelines are equally relevant to different partners. Given their diversity, there is no one-size-fits-all recipe.

The difficulty in reconciling the various aspects of an effective approach to strategic partners should not be understated. The EU needs to walk a fine line between its values and its interests, and between firmness and engagement. The core question is how to accompany power shifts with a shift towards positive sum relations between major powers. For the EU, the basic assumption should be that a multipolar system fraught with political and economic tensions would ultimately undermine not only the strategic objectives that the EU has set for itself but also the values of peace, democracy, human rights and freedom from want that the EU upholds.¹³ In pursuing strategic partnerships, therefore, long-term interests should not fall prey to short-term concerns ‘at a given moment’, and fulfilling EU values should be more about consistent practice and incremental achievements than principled assertions.

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13. S. Biscop (ed.), ‘The Value of Power, the Power of Values: A Call for an EU Grand Strategy’, Egmont paper 33, Egmont, October 2009, pp. 15-19.

● EU pride, not prejudice

Strategic partnerships are a political affair and, in politics, perceptions matter. Building effective partnerships starts with revamping the fading profile of the EU. This takes political conviction and, yes, pride in what the EU is and has achieved. The EU cannot mimic classical great powers, assuming they exist amidst today's deep interdependence. It should celebrate its uniqueness as a group of states sharing values, interests, some sovereignty and a common destiny, and not feel diminished by the sometimes *old* rhetoric of *new* powers. The EU experience is not overtaken by events. It is in fact more likely to fit them better than other models over time.

The European Council has reiterated that 'synergies need to be developed between the European Union's external relations and member states' bilateral relations with third countries'. This is essential whether one looks at specific initiatives or summit events. At the highest political level, reasserting the profile of the Union is a job for EU and, crucially, national leaders.¹⁴ In their own bilateral dealings, beyond the comfortable statements of the European Council, they should make a point of recalling the value they attach to the Union, to what it stands for and to the interests they share, and be prepared to act in consequence. If they do not, why should their interlocutors believe they really care? Short of such regular, high-profile political endorsement, and consistent behaviour, perhaps most of the other measures outlined here would at best tinker with a basic, unresolved credibility problem.¹⁵

The national 'ownership' of EU foreign policy is a critical condition for its success. This is all the more so in relation to strategic partners, used to dealing with states. Moving from discourse to practice, creative ways should be explored to make member states committed stakeholders of EU strategic partnerships. For example, at the initiative of the High Representative, the Foreign Affairs Council could decide to mandate the foreign minister of a member state to explore solutions to difficult political issues in relations with strategic partners. The EU should benefit from the experience and expertise of its member states.

That said, this option should be pursued only with some conditions. First, there should be no prejudice to the competences of EU institutions. Second, the High Representative should be closely associated to the work of the minister in question and report to EU bodies. Third, these high-level diplomatic 'pathfinders' would be charged with defining the terms of possible arrangements but would not be able to commit the Union, as the final word would lie with the 27. Such an approach may help deliver on distinct matters but should not become standard practice. The priority should be to strengthen EU foreign policy actors and structures.

14. This happens all too rarely. For a good example of a truly European message as the basis for an effective EU-China partnership, see the recent speech by Italian President Giorgio Napolitano, '*Europa e Cina: crescita e stabilità nel XXI secolo. L'impegno dell'Italia*' ('Europe and China: growth and stability in the XXI century. The commitment of Italy'), Beijing, 26 October 2010.

15. On the heterogeneity of national positions and messages in relations with major third countries, see M. Leonard and N. Popescu, 'A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations', European Council on Foreign Relations, November 2007; J. Fox and F. Godement, 'A Power Audit of EU-China Relations', European Council on Foreign Relations, April 2009; N. Witney and J. Shapiro, 'Towards a post-American Europe. A Power Audit of EU-US Relations', European Council on Foreign Relations, November 2009.

● Brace for ‘modern’ aiming for ‘post-modern’

The Romans used to say: *‘si vis pacem, para bellum’* (if you want peace, prepare for war). In a less bellicose vein, and drawing on familiar academic speak, one could argue that while it aims to build more ‘post-modern’ relations based on the win-wins of interdependence, the Union should gear up for ‘modern’ bargaining and trade-offs with hard-headed powers, when need be.¹⁶ The Union has not been equipped, nor often empowered, to perform as a fully-fledged international actor, notably in bilateral relations. There is a chance for progress with the creation of the new trio of EU top posts – the President of the European Council, the President of the Commission and the High Representative/ Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP) – and the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS). These innovations are expected to bring more continuity and coherence to EU external action. That the Union is not a state does not mean it should not seek to develop the practical tools of effective diplomacy.

Effective partnerships require the capacity to craft one clear position, deliver it through appropriate means at the appropriate level, having the necessary flexibility and authority to negotiate on that basis, mobilise the right mix of incentives and disincentives and be prepared to use them. The ongoing reform of the external representation of the Union goes in the right direction. Some division of tasks is in the process of being carved out between the President of the European Council, the President of the Commission and the HR/VP, including with a view to bilateral and multilateral summits. This is learning by doing and, predictably, the source of more controversy to come in Brussels.

Progress should be made towards the policy mode of ‘supervised delegation’ applied in trade matters and experimented in areas of mixed competence but also, if more informally, in the CFSP, for example when the High Representative negotiates on the Iranian nuclear dossier on behalf of the EU.¹⁷ In the presence of broad inter-governmental agreement, EU representatives should be given sufficient leeway to bargain on behalf of the Union, while regularly reporting to member states. All too often EU leaders are supposed to carry common positions vis-à-vis strategic partners but are not provided with the necessary margin of manoeuvre to enter trade-offs that imply actual concessions on the part of the Union.¹⁸ Fewer representatives with one message and the authority to use carrots and sticks spanning across connected policy areas is the way forward. The Copenhagen climate change conference has demonstrated that a shared position, however ambitious, is not enough, if it is not backed by a sharp diplomatic strategy and managed by a clear agent for negotiations.

● Multilateral ends by bilateral means

The European Council has put on the agenda of EU bilateral partnerships with Asian countries issues ‘such as the respective roles in achieving a sustainable recovery from the economic crisis and in seeking global solutions to universal challenges.’ The EU should use strategic partnerships to discuss global issues, as a stepping stone to attain convergence in multilateral

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16. On the use of this vocabulary with reference to EU foreign policy, see R. Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations. Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century* (Atlantic Books, 2003).

17. B. Coeuré and J. Pisani-Ferry, ‘The governance of the European Union’s international economic relations: how many voices?’ in A. Sapir (ed.), *Fragmented Power: Europe and the Global Economy* (Bruegel Books, 2007).

18. These and other points have been aptly restated by the foreign minister of Finland. See A. Stubb, ‘Dignified foreign policy’, speech delivered at the London School of Economics and Political Science, 11 November 2010.

fora. This fits the EU identity and long-term interests.¹⁹ But strategic partnerships are not only a tool to reinforce global governance; they are also, and primarily, about meeting respective demands. Their relevance to multilateral negotiations is a function of their relevance to bilateral issues as well. For example, their use in achieving a new global emissions regime is a function of their ability to boost technology and financial transfers as well as joint R&D on sustainable energy sources between partners.

Aside from very specific dossiers, it is indeed difficult to draw a clear-cut separation between bilateral and multilateral issues. Dealings at one level create political space for meaningful progress at the other level, and vice-versa. The ongoing debate on exchange rates and monetary imbalances shows that bilateral tensions are more likely to be overcome in the context of broader arrangements, including both more players and trade-offs beyond the specific currency issue.

However, the willingness to engage on global issues at the bilateral level reflects the degree of mutual understanding between the two parties and their assessment that their more pressing interests are being addressed. Furthermore, some of these issues are about foreign and security policy, such as Afghanistan for the US, the common neighbourhood with the EU in the case of Russia, the reform of the UN Security Council and nuclear cooperation for India or the question of the arms embargo (in addition to the issue of market economy status) from a Chinese perspective. Given the weakness, or absence, of a common position among member states on many of these matters, the EU has limited experience, or has experienced limited success, in dealing with them. Since, however, strategic partnerships are also comprehensive ones, leapfrogging hard and soft bilateral issues to discuss transnational challenges proves its limits.

Emerging powers stress that there is a deficit of trust and mutual understanding in their relations with the EU (and the US).²⁰ This can be a rhetorical argument to deflect EU demands and reject clear commitments. That said, as a matter of fact, different worldviews coexist and sometimes compete. All actors need to go the extra mile to better appreciate respective views and motivations. Effective partnerships are both confidence-building tools and negotiating platforms among equals.

● Regional meat on bilateral bones

The EU is, no doubt, a *sui generis* regional body. EU governance embodies a unique mix of supranational and intergovernmental features. The EU is laboriously seeking to gear up to perform as an international actor in its own right, including by acquiring legal personality under the Lisbon Treaty. Given its hybrid nature and its driving objective to build an effective multilateral system, the EU has been a 'natural' supporter of regional cooperation elsewhere in the world. It has entered several inter-regional dialogues, for example with the African Union, MERCOSUR, and ASEAN.²¹

19. A. de Vasconcelos, 'Multilateralising multipolarity', in G. Grevi and A. de Vasconcelos (eds.), op. cit. in note 9.

20. 'Global Governance 2025', op. cit. in note 6, pp. 10-14 and 43-47.

21. M. Telò (ed.), *EU and New Regionalism* (Ashgate, 2007).

It is widely acknowledged that such dialogues have not delivered many tangible achievements and that other regional organisations are not bent on emulating the so-called European model of rule-based integration. That said, the question is whether the EU should shift focus from this level of engagement to strategic partnerships with global players. This has been, in practice if not by design, the trend in the last decade, with the partial exception of Africa where various levels of engagement have been pursued simultaneously and the joint Africa-EU strategy concluded in 2007. Arguably, a more effective approach would consist of using inter-regional relations both as engines for deeper regional cooperation and as platforms to connect with strategic partners.

Such an approach would fit current steps to expand frameworks for regional cooperation in East Asia and South America. These are not EU-inspired but rather endogenous developments to respective regions. They reflect a sense of growing regional self-reliance given the weakness (or perceived distance) of larger multilateral frameworks and the investment of pivotal regional players, such as China and Brazil, in regional arrangements to mainstream their influence by soft means. Regional or sub-regional orders are slowly emerging, notably in East Asia and to some extent in South America, to manage interdependence and channel power relations. They do not entail a pooling of sovereignty or binding commitments but they reflect the evolving synthesis of different agendas on how to preserve stability and growth in respective regions.

The question is therefore how the EU could shape inter-regional relations in a more strategic and coherent fashion both to support regional frameworks, where relevant, and to establish linkages with strategic partners through a variety of platforms. Relevant issues for this two-fold approach may include, aside from trade, climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, disaster relief, energy security, the management of scarce resources, new approaches to development cooperation as well as crisis prevention and crisis management in respective regions. Options should be explored to deepen the dialogue on these and other matters with ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asian Summit, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), among other bodies. In a positive development, negotiations towards a free trade agreement with MERCOSUR have acquired new momentum in 2010.

● A wider diplomatic portfolio – the ‘PIN’

As it invests in strategic partnerships with pivotal global actors, the EU should diversify its diplomatic portfolio and upgrade its relations with key regional players. Three connected factors should guide the identification of such players. Firstly, the very interest of the EU in boosting economic exchanges and, where needed, supporting the rule of law and democratic reforms in important emerging countries. Secondly, given the size of these countries relative to most of their neighbours, their ‘swing’ potential for promoting stability or generating turbulence in respective regions. These countries can also play a leading role together with continental heavyweights such as China or India in fostering regional cooperation. Finally, a deeper partnership with important regional players can enhance the political profile of the Union in the respective regions and provide the EU with more leverage in its relations with global partners. Partnerships with the latter are strategic but not exclusive.

Based on this set of criteria, key regional partners for the EU include such diverse countries as Pakistan, Indonesia and Nigeria (PIN). This is of course not an exhaustive list. As noted

above, EU relations with, for example, Japan, South Korea, Mexico and South Africa are, for all their differences, high on the EU foreign policy agenda. What is common to the ‘PIN’ trio is that the depth of EU political engagement with these countries does not yet match their current and future strategic relevance. It suffices to recall, among many other indicators, that the population of these three partners, situated in critical and fragile global regions, is expected to grow from 574 to 720 million in the next fifteen years.

2009 has marked a step change in the format of EU relations with the PIN. Since June 2009, the EU has held two summits with Pakistan, aiming to build a comprehensive partnership for peace and development. The EU and Indonesia concluded a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in the same year, focusing on education, human rights and democracy, trade and investment and the environment. A ‘joint way forward’ has been agreed between the EU and Nigeria at the Prague summit in 2009 to intensify political dialogue and outline priorities for enhanced cooperation. These are positive developments but need to be substantiated by more political focus and authority, adding a strategic dimension to these sprawling relationships. Again, this is more about substance than definitions. In addition to mobilising resources for more targeted support to good governance and development, the EU should be able to talk seriously to the PIN about their regional security concerns and, where relevant, to contribute to building with them a more stable regional order. As with global players, rallying EU member states behind a clear set of political priorities in relation to the PIN will be decisive.

● Multi-dimensional partnerships

Effective partnerships go beyond state-to-state relations. It is understood that ‘the wider the base of a partnership, the more lasting it is’.²² There is no substitute for intergovernmental proceedings and decisions to create viable frameworks of rules. Increasingly, however, non-state actors play an essential role in international affairs via transnational networks of business, civil society and expertise. These networks are probably the biggest, pluralist stakeholder of a functioning international system and of effective bilateral partnerships as well. Their contribution makes multilateral and bilateral cooperation multi-dimensional.²³

They provide knowledge to inform negotiations and resources to implement decisions. They allow for the inclusion of a variety of perspectives into decision-making, thereby enhancing the accountability of the process and the visibility of the output, including in societies which are not as open as European ones. Crucially, they help create bonds between people and improve mutual understanding based on concrete needs, from the bottom up. Their insight in domestic debates and priorities can provide a useful basis to uncover areas of possible convergence and cooperation. In addition to non-state actors proper, there is scope for further involvement of sub-national authorities in the proceedings of strategic partnerships. For example, issues related to urban development and the provision of local services are among those that emerging powers will face as they invest in the quality, and not just the pace, of their growth.

22. W. J. Burns, 2009, op. cit. in note 12.

23. Global Redesign Initiative, ‘Everybody’s Business: Strengthening International Cooperation in a More Interdependent World’, World Economic Forum, 2010, pp. 19-44.

Multidimensional partnerships offer a comparative advantage to the EU, which benefits from a thriving business community, a vibrant NGO sector and numerous research networks, all of them familiar with operating in transnational settings. The EU should be better able to draw on this wealth of talent and entrepreneurship – the core of its much-celebrated soft power – to pursue its priorities. It should play an enabling role, where appropriate, with a view to broadening the basis of strategic partnerships.

More resources should be made available for people-to-people contacts, including exchanges of students and young professionals. These programmes do not come cheap but they are definitely a smart long-term investment, notably when targeting specific constituencies, for example the scientific communities leading technological innovation and the media. Furthermore, the connection between bilateral political summits and top-level events bringing together other constituencies such as business but also NGOs and think tanks should be deepened. Currently, different models of more or less structured business-to-business dialogue coexist. Alongside yearly business summits, some sectoral dialogues are pursued on issues such as textiles with China. Strategic partnerships would benefit from more extensive sectoral dialogues and from the regular input of joint business platforms, involving economic actors from both partners, in formal proceedings.

Delivering effective partnerships

»» Building effective partnerships is not primarily about institutions, but politics. In particular, as noted above, it is about the coherence between EU and national positions and initiatives, and about the factors that shape them at the domestic level. That said, building a stronger, more integrated framework for EU foreign policy-making is a necessary requirement for success. One year after the appointment of the President of the European Council and of the HR/VP, and on the eve of the launch of the EEAS, it is high time to look at the potential for innovation within the institutional system with a view to strategic partnerships. Drawing a distinction between individual summits and overall partnerships is a first important step.

Summits are just the tip of the iceberg. If they float above the waterline, it is because the ‘critical mass’ of the relationship, including several exchanges at official and ministerial level, sustains and informs them. Typically, summits with strategic partners are not the place where serious differences are ironed out and grand bargains are struck over a few hours. The last thing that the leaders of large emerging countries want is to appear to have had their arm twisted or to have been cornered. Rather, summits are successful if they are very well prepared (well understood division of labour within the EU and clear common messages) and leaders are called upon to close deals when positions are already converging. Hard talk ought to take place in other platforms. Summits offer a major opportunity to feel the pulse of the relationship at the highest level, explore new dimensions of cooperation and present results.

The European Council has rightly called for developing the practice of ‘orientation debates’ well before summits. It is important to read this recommendation in conjunction with the following one in the conclusions, whereby the EU and its member states should more actively share information and consultation on respective dealings with third parties, based on a running calendar of national bilateral summits with major partners. Incidentally, this is just a specific application of the commitments that member states have entered into through the Treaty of Lisbon.²⁴

If the goal of a more coherent and consistent approach to EU strategic partners is to be meaningfully implemented, goodwill may help but it will not suffice. The existing institutional framework is to be made both more systemic and more flexible. This is about the institutional capacity to adjust to different conjunctures and complex agendas with tempo and focus, aside from running business-as-usual. System-wide and flexible policy-making is not the natural reflex of large, compartmentalised administrations.

On the one hand, setting up the new EEAS will probably create at least as many problems as it solves over the short term. In fact, there is a risk that the establishment of the new service as a ‘functionally autonomous body’ from the Commission and the Council Secretariat makes coordination across all dimensions of EU external action more complicated and controversial. That would be a paradoxical outcome for a reform conceived to generate coherence. The consequences would be particularly serious in so far as strategic partnerships are concerned.

On the other hand, the current stage of institutional reform does provide an unprecedented, and perhaps unique, opportunity to establish working methods that do not necessarily replace, but complement existing ones, pushing the boundaries of comprehensiveness and flexibility in shaping EU external action. Such boundaries go, of course, beyond the EEAS.

Strategic partnerships touch upon a range of issues larger than the remit of the EEAS, chiefly trade and other largely economic matters. As such, it is necessary to frame the management of these partnerships in the context of the High Representative’s tasks as Vice-President of the Commission mandated to ensure the consistency of the Union’s external action and ‘responsible within the Commission for responsibilities incumbent on it in external relations and for coordinating other aspects of the Union’s external action’.²⁵

This responsibility has so far been translated into two levels of interaction between the HR/VP and other commissioners dealing with external policies or with policies carrying an important external dimension. The HR/VP is supposed to coordinate the three commissioners in charge of, respectively, enlargement and neighbourhood policy, development and international cooperation, and humanitarian aid and civil protection. Besides, the HR/VP chairs one of the groups of commissioners set up in April 2010 which includes, on top of those mentioned above, the Commissioner for Trade, the Commissioner for Economic and Mon-

24. Relevant provisions include, in so far as foreign policy proper is concerned, Article 24.3 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU), whereby member states shall support the CFSP ‘in a spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity and shall comply with the Union’s action in this area’; Article 25 TEU, whereby the EU shall conduct the CFSP by ‘strengthening systematic cooperation between Member States’; Article 29 TEU, whereby ‘Member States shall ensure that their national policies conform to the Union’s positions’; and Article 32 TEU, according to which ‘Member States shall consult one another within the European Council and the Council on any matter of foreign and security policy of general interest in order to determine a common approach. ... Member States shall ensure, through the convergence of their actions, that the Union is able to assert its interests and values on the international scene. Member States shall show mutual solidarity.’

25. Article 18.4, TEU.

etary Affairs and, if need be, others. These groups of commissioners are tasked by the President of the Commission to ensure the effective preparation of key initiatives.²⁶ The President of the Commission himself is responsible for providing the guidelines for the work of the Commission and for ensuring that it acts ‘consistently, efficiently and as a collegiate body’.²⁷

If this multilayered institutional framework is to be more effective in dealing with strategic partnerships, then different players should come together from across the system in a flexible fashion, depending on matters, priorities or crises at hand. A detailed examination of existing procedures goes beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, drawing on the requirements identified here, a broad proposition is made in what follows to enhance institutional performance. A limited number of focal points should be established, each dealing with one strategic partnership, chiefly mandated to connect the dots within EU institutions and between the EU and member states.

As for the potential job description of these focal points, the management of strategic partnerships roughly entails six basic functions: first, country analysis, collection of information, and drafting of country strategy papers and other policy documents; second, the management and allocation of relevant financial resources to underpin EU action vis-à-vis strategic partners; third, representation and negotiation at a variety of levels; fourth, coordination across all relevant services, within and outside the EEAS, to ensure the coherence of the Union’s posture and policy in relations with major partners; fifth, coordination with member states to better connect national agendas to the EU’s; and sixth, any other business, for example specific tasking in relation to critical dimensions of the partnership. These functions are central to foreign policy-making beyond strategic partnerships, but the latter are more demanding because of their political salience and breadth. There is a need to complement business-as-usual with nodes in the system that can mobilise institutional actors in different formats, depending on needs and not just on procedures.

Focal points should be senior officials within the EEAS, with a direct link to the HR/VP, charged with promoting horizontal (between services and institutions) and vertical (between the EU and member states) coherence, and with undertaking any other special assignment if requested. Their tasks would concern policy-making within the Union and not the formal representation of the EU vis-à-vis respective partners. Running the partnership would remain the prerogative of competent departments across the institutional system. In essence, focal points would play a complementary role when it comes to the fourth, fifth and sixth functions listed above. In so doing, they would help ensure that all EU actors and negotiators play from the same hymn sheet, and coordinate their tactics, in dealing with different dossiers.

As networkers in a ring-fenced world, focal points will not have an easy time in fitting the system, which is itself in the process of restructuring. To fulfil their mandate, they will need two closely linked assets: the political authority stemming from their connection with the HR/VP; and the informality of their convening, coordinating and



26. For a detailed analysis of these and other arrangements concerning EU external action, see ‘The Treaty of Lisbon: A Second Look at the Institutional Innovations’, Joint Study, Centre for European Policy Studies, Egmont, the European Policy Centre, September 2010, pp. 144-145. See also A. Missiroli, ‘The New EU “Foreign Policy” System after Lisbon: A Work in Progress’, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 15(3), 2010.

27. Article 17.6, TEU.

reporting tasks, which are not meant to replace those of others but to complement them by activating connections, setting up ad hoc task forces and mainstreaming horizontal issues. Focal points should closely liaise with the senior officials in charge of relations with individual partners, for example via monthly meetings or whenever needed, at the initiative of either side.

Taking the EU-China partnership, for example, the focal point could convene regular meetings looking at China's influence in Central Asia, the domestic situation in Central Asian republics and the implications of these developments for the EU's own priorities in the region and for relevant aspects of EU-China relations. Taking the EU-Brazil partnership, the focal point could be asked to deliver a report on the connections between Brazil's as yet modest but growing contribution to development cooperation and its economic investment strategy in developing countries. There could be a focus on how Brazilian public and private actors contribute to environmentally sustainable growth models in third countries, so as to explore possible synergies with EU programmes and establish new areas of cooperation in the bilateral partnership. As for the EU-India partnership, the focal point could engage relevant services in a review of India's energy security including major suppliers, the issue of transit routes, the nuclear question and investment in clean energy. This could provide a basis for a comprehensive engagement with India on sensitive matters that offer considerable scope for cooperation spanning across foreign and security policy, energy policy proper and technological cooperation. With respect to the EU-Russia partnership, the focal point could convene a task force looking at concrete proposals for cooperation on the protection and resilience of energy, transport and communication infrastructures against the dangers posed by non-state actors and new threats such as cyber-attacks.

Aside from these or other examples, the bottom line is that focal points could facilitate communication, improve coherence and make sure that all relevant expertise is mobilised across EU institutions and also from the outside, as appropriate. In short, they could help shape a better strategy to deal with pivotal partners.

Turning to vertical coherence, focal points would not replace existing mechanisms either. In fact, considering the high politics involved, they would surely not be game-changers. However, they could oil the exchange of information on member states' activities by, for example, travelling to national capitals to meet senior officials in various ministries, collect feedback and look ahead to upcoming bilateral developments. On that basis, they would report back to the HR/VP and to the groups of commissioners and liaise with the chairs of the relevant Council working groups and committees. The agendas of these groups should include more focused consultations on the many links between national policies and EU positions and priorities.

Such regular exchanges would provide a stepping stone for the substantial orientation debates on relations with individual partners envisaged by the European Council, to be held in informal or formal sessions of the Foreign Affairs Council. These debates should be prepared by a document drafted by the HR/VP in close cooperation with the Commission outlining key points for discussion and, where possible, a limited range of options for future EU positions. Orientation debates should provide more than an opportunity for an exchange of views. They should deliver guidelines framing EU and national policies alike, to be agreed and adopted by the European Council, according to the spirit and the letter of the Lisbon Treaty.

Conclusion

» This contribution has set the renewed ambition of the EU to pursue strategic partnerships with pivotal countries in a global context that bears the seeds of both conflict and cooperation. Ultimately, EU strategic partnerships are about averting the former, and engendering the latter.

The EU needs to adjust to a challenging, polycentric international system which may evolve towards either conflict-prone multipolarity or a relatively more stable inter-polar world, where large power centres seek to reconcile their differences to reap the benefits, and curb the risks, of interdependence. Chances are that features of both balance of power and a concert of powers will coexist for the foreseeable future.

In this context, the EU should act as a partnership entrepreneur, investing in relations with those countries that can make a critical difference to international cooperation and to the strategic interests of the Union. The EU needs to perform a double act: firstly, deepening its political cohesion and displaying a more robust diplomatic posture to defend its interests; and secondly, fulfilling the ambition to go beyond zero-sum games in its relations with other powers and identify concrete common interests as a basis for bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

Lately, the EU discourse has sometimes been harder than its actions, and its actions clumsier than its interests and ambition call for. As a result, both the hard and the soft power of the Union have been waning. The September European Council has called upon the EU and its member states to get their act together in a more competitive global environment, with a particular focus on relations with strategic partners. Strategic partnerships are long-term and comprehensive ones. This paper has outlined the six pillars of a long-term, comprehensive strategy to build effective partnerships, with a focus on emerging global actors.

First, cement the coherence between the discourse and practice of the EU and of its member states. EU partners legitimately consider the coherence between them the litmus test of the credibility of the Union. Conversely, political pressure consistently applied through several EU and national channels would multiply EU influence. Second, endow the Union with the necessary tools of effective diplomacy. In particular, clear and shared negotiating positions, a suitable set of incentives and disincentives but also sufficient flexibility for EU representatives to enter necessary trade-offs. Third, use bilateral partnerships to build confidence and meet the key interests of both parties, as a stepping stone to engage partners in addressing global problems at the multilateral level. Fourth, upgrade inter-regional dialogues so as to both support regional cooperation and stability and connect with strategic partners through a variety of platforms. Fifth, broaden the diplomatic portfolio of the Union by strengthening its relations with key regional players such as the PIN – Pakistan, Indonesia and Nigeria – thereby enhancing its political profile and its interests in critical theatres. Sixth, expand the basis of strategic partnerships by further involving non-state actors via people to people contacts and exchanges and through wider interaction between the civil society organisations and the business communities of either partner.

In short, from an EU standpoint, effective partnerships are those that harness bilateral relations to enhance cooperation in larger frameworks and that bring multiple political levers and constituencies to bear on bilateral relations, in the pursuit of European interests and values.

The EU strives, albeit painfully, to evolve into a fully-fledged global actor. Part of such effort consists of building up its credentials as a strategic partner. That will require not only new political momentum, but also quite a lot of homework regarding institutions, while the new foreign policy structures are set up. The Union's power to act is unevenly dispersed across a variety of policy areas. But no other body the size of the Union has such a breadth of tools and, while states are normally more effective in using them, only one or two countries can match the combined resources of the EU and of its member states. It is essential to make the institutional framework more systemic, more flexible and more focused, all the more so when dealing with purposeful strategic partners.

The proposal that a limited number of focal points should be created has been advanced here, each of which would deal with one strategic partnership, tasked with mobilising institutional expertise and resources from across the board according to political needs, and not just standard procedures. These senior officials should activate connections, link issues, and mainstream horizontal questions, thereby promoting the coherence and the effectiveness of the EU approach to strategic partners, and helping innovate the partnership agenda. Their convening, coordinating and reporting tasks would not affect but complement the powers of those in charge of running the partnerships and related negotiations, according to respective institutional prerogatives.

The EU should approach strategic partnerships so as to accompany power shifts with a shift towards positive-sum relations between major powers. Based on a sharper definition of the interests that it shares with its strategic partners, and of the issues where they differ, the EU should wrap up its partners in such a thick web of relations so that the cost of political conflict outweighs that of compromise and cooperation. The smartest form of power is that which is not felt as such.

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