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FACING THE AMERICAN “PIVOT” TO ASIA: EU’S ROLE IN THE POWER-BALANCING GAME IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA FROM A NEOREALIST PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT

The rise of China and the “pivot” to Asia announced by the US pose new geopolitical challenges that should be recognized and properly addressed by the European Union. Adapting elements of the neorealist perspective on international relations, this article intends to briefly analyse current and possible role for the EU in the Asian power-balancing game. It also examines the capabilities, interests and deficiencies of the EU as a security actor in the Asia Pacific, and investigates whether the EU’s capacities are enough to potentially counterbalance other powers in Asia. Even though there are numerous shortages to the EU’s “actorness” and capability to act, it is still the biggest economy in the world, which can be successfully translated into leverage while counterbalancing other powers. Also, developed expertise in non-traditional security matters as well as recent institutional developments provide for the EU’s stronger international presence and growing power capacity. However, this potential needs to be well managed. The EU suffers from leadership deficiency and lacks a strong, coherent strategy towards Asia that could match the one of the United States. Such strategy is essential for the EU’s security and economic prosperity given growing interdependence between Asian Pacific and European economies as well as increasing role of the Asian powers in global affairs. Especially the rapid growth of China brings several implications not only for the general world order, but also for the EU’s position in its hierarchy. Often the power-balancing game in Asia Pacific is depicted as centring around the US-China rivalry for influence. Having in mind that the US is one of the key players in the region, also the EU-US partnership needs a new, Asian dimension which could determine the further role of the transatlantic alliance in a changing security environment. Finally, all comes

down to a question not only about the EU's capacity and willingness to become a global power; but also about if it can afford not to become one.

KEYWORDS *neorealism, EU-Asia relations, EU security and foreign policy, pivot to Asia, balance of power*

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War brought fundamental changes to the international system. The long-established balance between two Great Powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, disappeared, bringing destabilization and uncertainty to world politics. A short moment of unipolarity is passing away giving the stage to the emerging multipolarity. From the realist perspective, a multipolar world carries the biggest potential for conflict. New powers demand their share in global politics; old powers seek to retain their status quo. In the post-bipolar era the growing political and economic significance of Asia turn the region into a subject to the world's geopolitical game. Barack Obama's administration already addressed the challenge and announced the US "pivot" to Asia, strengthening diplomatic and military presence on the Asian continent. On the other hand, the oldest American ally – Europe – represented by the European Union seems to be rather sluggish recognizing the shift in power politics and addressing it properly. Is there a role for the European Union in Asian power balancing? What are the EU's capabilities, interests and deficiencies as a security actor in the Asia Pacific? And, finally, are the EU's capacities enough to potentially counterbalance other powers in Asia?

This article intends to analyse the position of the EU as an actor in the Asian power-balancing game, taking into consideration the EU's unique hybrid character and resulting capabilities and limitations. Adapting elements of the neorealist perspective on international relations, the article looks first into the available literature on the contemporary international system and the EU's position in it. Based on the recent developments, the essay provides some arguments for the EU's security and economic interests in Asia. Secondly, this article examines the EU's ability to engage politically and become a fully-fledged security actor in Asia, given its institutional set up, economic, military and leadership capacity as well as declared foreign policy's priorities. That is to be followed by an insight into a current state of EU-Asia relations. Subsequently, the article's focus is shifted to the present-day role of transatlantic partnership in Asia, the nature of US engagement in the Asia Pacific and their implications for the EU's "actorness" in the region. The final section provides a short summary of presented arguments as well as conclusions which can be drawn from them. In this article, the emphasis is put primarily on international relations in East Asia, consisting of China, Japan, Taiwan, North and South Korea, and in Southeast Asia, comprised of ASEAN members. The author recognizes that for the full picture of

Asian power relations one should also include in their calculations India and Russia. However, concerning both the content capacity of this essay, as well as the recent international focus put primarily on the Asia Pacific region, the choice of the geographic scope of the analysis has certain legitimacy. For the sake of this article only, the term "Asia" appears interchangeably to the described above regions of East and Southeast Asia unless the context indicates otherwise.

1. NEOREALISM, BALANCE OF POWER AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Until recently neorealism has had little to say about the European integration and the EU's position in the world¹. Indeed, the state-centric approach might have some difficulties explaining the unique pool of shared sovereignty created in the heart of Europe. In line with the neorealist argumentation, close interstate cooperation should remain unlikely in the fear of unequal gains as autarky is the recipe for survival². However, Sebastian Rosato³ in his recently published book *Europe United* offers a realist explanation for the creation of the European Community (EC). According to him the EC came into being as a result of power-balancing against the Soviet Union, as well as France and Germany balancing against each other. He also concludes that the dissolution of the Soviet Union has stripped the EC of its fundamental purpose and thus further political and military integration are improbable, eventually leading to the marginalization of the EU's role in Europe. However, as the "inherently stable" bipolar system passed into history and the united West no longer balanced the united East, the European states needed to face new challenges in a whole new balancing game.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the international system experienced a "moment of unipolarity" when the United States remained a dominating power that was not challenged by any other international actors. However, the moment of unipolarity is coming to its end as the rise of China is beginning to counter the US primacy of power. In a response to this new geopolitical challenge, the US administration announced in 2009 its military and diplomatic "pivot" to Asia. The so-called "rebalancing" is premised on the recognition that "the lion's share of the political and economic history of the 21st century will be written in the Asia-Pacific region"⁴. After the British⁵ and the American one⁶, this predicts a coming of an "Asian century".

¹ D. Kenealy, K. Kostagiannis, "Realist vision of European Union: E. H. Carr and integration", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2 (2013), pp. 221-246, [online] DOI: 10.1177/0305829812464571.

² K. Waltz, *Theory of international politics*, Reading, Mass. 1979, p. 106.

³ S. Rosato, *Europe united. Power politics and the making of the European Community*, Ithaca 2011.

⁴ K. Campbell, B. Andrews, "Explaining the US 'pivot' to Asia", *Chatham House Americas Paper*, no. 1 (2013), p. 2.

⁵ See literature on *Pax Britannica*, "British century" refers here to the period of "Pax Britannica".

⁶ H. Luce, "The American Century", reprinted in M. J. Hogan (ed.), *The ambiguous legacy. U.S. foreign relations in the "American century"*, Cambridge, 1999.

Even if some neglect the legitimacy of Obama's "pivot" to Asia⁷, the growing interest in the Asia Pacific region is undeniable. Indeed, the increasing economic and political importance of Asian states has recently received a lot of global attention. After more than two decades of rapid economic development, the biggest country in the region, China, has enough capacity to become a great power again. Since 1992 the Chinese GDP annual growth rate has always been significantly higher than those of the United States or the European Union. Even in 2009, in the year affected heavily by the world economic crisis, China maintained its GDP annual growth at 6.2% compared to the EU's – 5.4% and the US' – 3.5%⁸ (see the graph below). The answer to the famous question of Richard Betts: "Should we want China to get rich or not?"⁹ becomes more and more urgent to formulate in today's world politics. A realist response to the question above would be a definite "no", as wealthy China would overturn any balance of power¹⁰. While economic power is not the only determinant of a state's power in the international system, it unquestionably helps establish its military and political influence¹¹. Even though some claim that China does not show any signs of hegemonic aspirations in its foreign policy¹², their possible revisionist and destabilizing attitude awakened security concerns worldwide. China's military and technological capabilities continue to expand and the future behaviour of the emerging economic giant cannot be predicted as it might wish, in line with realist assumptions, to maximize its power and reverse the world order.

Should the new rebalancing game be a security concern to the European states? Is there a role to play for the European Union in this particular international environment? Even though East Asia seems geographically distant, there are some factors one needs to take into consideration before giving a definite answer. After the end of the Cold War, the spreading effects of globalization sparked a debate on the broadening definition of security¹³. While matters of traditional security still remained core to a state's sovereignty, the non-traditional security issues: economic, environmental, en-

⁷ See: R. Chen, "A critical analysis of the U.S. 'pivot' toward the Asia-Pacific: how realistic is Neo-realism?", *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Summer 2013), pp. 39-62, [online] DOI: 10.11610/Connections.12.3.03.

⁸ Economic indicators, [online] <http://www.ieconomics.com>, 12 December 2015.

⁹ R. Betts, "Wealth, power and instability: East Asia and the United States after the Cold War", *International Security*, vol. 18, no. 3 (1993-1994), p. 55.

¹⁰ Idem, "Wealth, power and instability", in: M. Brown, S. Lynn-Jones, S. Miller (eds.), *East Asian Security*, Cambridge, Mass. 1996, p. 53.

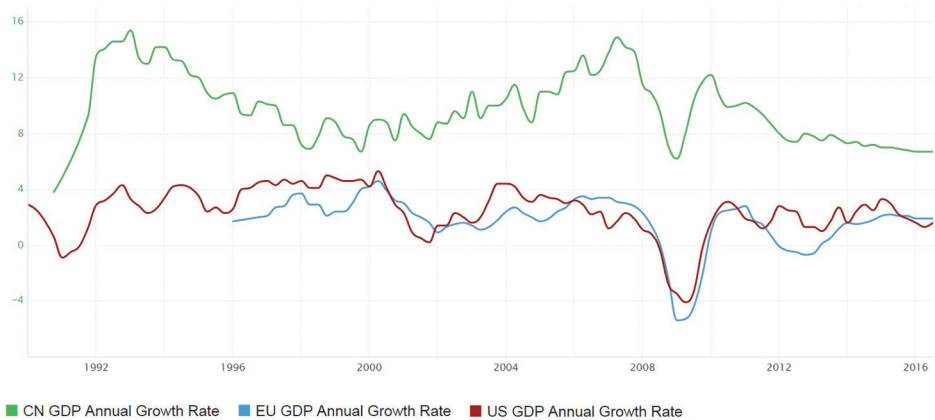
¹¹ A. Patel, "The end of the unipolar international order? Implications of the recent thaw in Sino-Indian relations", *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Winter 2006), p. 14.

¹² D. Kang, "Getting Asia wrong: the need for new analytical frameworks", *International Security*, vol. 27, no. 4 (2003), [online] DOI: 10.1162/016228803321951090.

¹³ See: B. Buzan, *People, states and fear. The national security problem in international relations*, Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf 1991; D. Baldwin, "The concept of security", *Review of International Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1 (January 1997), pp. 5-26; E. Rothschild, "What is security?", *Daedalus*, vol. 124, no. 3 (Summer 1995), pp. 53-98.

ergy and human gained increasing recognition in the academia¹⁴. Europe’s economic security, defined as *the long-term ability to protect its relative welfare position by ensuring access to resources and production capability, securing market outlets and maintaining macroeconomic stability*¹⁵ is directly affected by developments in Asia, *in particular by the region’s steady, sustained and environmentally sustainable economic growth*¹⁶. Indeed, in 2014 East and Southeast Asia accounted for 27% of the EU’s trade, out of which more than 50% was constituted by China alone (see Table 1). This makes the EU market very sensitive for sudden changes in the Asia Pacific region and certainly provides rationale for European interest in the Asian power balance.

Fig. 1. GDP Annual Growth Rate (%) 1990-2016 – US, EU and China



Source: ieconomics.com.

Traditionally the European Union security strategies focused primarily on the EU’s neighbourhood. However, even if one focuses on the traditional security exclusively, in a globalized world the security became a concept that is not limited to physical borders any longer. An American scholar Geoffrey Kemp draws attention to the fact that China and other Asian powers, in order to satisfy their increasing demand for energy and export markets, are reaching all the way to Africa, the Middle East and Europe itself¹⁷. The increasing interconnectivity between Asia and the broader European neighbourhood needs to be recognized and included in the strategic calculations. Keeping that in mind, changes in the Asian balance of power might have tremendous influence not

¹⁴ J. Sperling, E. Kirchner, “Economic security and the problem of cooperation in post-Cold War Europe”, *Review of International Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2 (1998), pp. 221-237.

¹⁵ N. Casarini, “The securitization of EU-Asia relations in the post-Cold War era”, in: T. Christiansen, E. Kirchner, P. Murray (eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of EU-Asia relations*, Houndmills 2013, p. 183.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

¹⁷ G. Kemp, *The East moves West. India, China, and Asia’s growing presence in the Middle East*, Washington 2012.

only on the EU's economic well-being, but also on the hard security matters that are vital to the preservation of the European peace.

Tab. 1. Client and Supplier Countries of the EU in Merchandise Trade, 2014

Total EU Trade with	mIn euro	share (%)
China	466,826	13.8
ASEAN	179,718	5.3
Japan	108,483	3.2
South Korea	81,992	2.4
Hong Kong	45,584	1.3
Taiwan	40,174	1.2
North Korea	34	0.004
TOTAL	922,811	27

Source: own elaboration based on data retrieved from www.trade.ec.europa.eu.

In the multipolar world, the race for influence is inevitable as states rely primarily on the external balancing, as opposed to internal balancing while the bipolar system is in place. That should provide enough incentives for European states not only to maintain their interests in Asia but also to expand them accordingly. In the light of the US' rebalance towards Asia-Pacific, Luis Simón writes about the geopolitical importance of "middle spaces" of Indian Ocean, central Asia and the Arctic: *the ability of European to assert their interests [there] (...) – and in the European neighbourhood itself – is increasingly linked to their ability to maintain strategic influence in the Asia-Pacific*¹⁸. Thus, taking part in a power balancing game requires a comprehensive approach, in which, apart from the neighbourhood, also the above mentioned "middle spaces" and the Asia Pacific have to be taken into consideration.

Does the power rivalry in Asia provide a sufficient justification for European states to use the European Union as a gain maximizer? The answer might vary depending on which approach within the neorealist camp is to be adopted. Offensive realism, represented by John Mearsheimer, claims that the security dilemma requires each state to strive for power maximization, to seek not only security but also hegemony, and to distrust the intentions of other states¹⁹. In this pessimistic approach, since states are primarily concerned about military power and relative gains, the chances for international cooperation – like the European Union – are bleak. According to Mearsheimer, international institutions survive only thanks to a "false promise" of mitigating the effects of anarchy²⁰.

¹⁸ L. Simón, "Europe, the rise of Asia and the future of transatlantic relationship", *International Affairs*, vol. 91. no. 5 (2015), p. 970, [online] DOI: 10.1111/1468-2346.12393.

¹⁹ J. Mearsheimer, *The tragedy of Great Power politics*, New York 2001.

²⁰ Idem, "The false promise of international institutions," *International Security*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1994/1995), pp. 5-49.

The second approach within the neorealist school, defensive realism, sees a potential for international cooperation. Defensive realists *reasoned that under very common conditions the war-causing potential of anarchy is attenuated*²¹. There are number of factors, such as military technology, geography, strategic beliefs or modern nationalism that may increase the costs of offensive war, thus making anarchy less threatening and security more plentiful²². Given that the security dilemma is just a variable, as long as technology, geography and other factors favour defence over offense, the cooperation may have preference over confrontation²³.

In the case of the EU integration, the defensive realists rightfully predicted that post-Cold War Europe will favour peace as the analysis of the offense-defence balance clearly showed that today's EU strongly favoured defensive strategies²⁴. Therefore, even though the states still remain the primary actors in the international system, their interests could be channelled through international institutions and thus enable them to gain more leverage in power balancing. In might be argued that the Big Three – the UK, France, and Germany – use the European Union to balance each other within Asia as well as collectively balance against other important players – the United States and China. This essay investigates the latter argument. Is the EU able to balance other big international players? The partial answer to that question lies in the EU's institutional and actual capability to act which is to be investigated in the next section of the article.

2. EU AS AN INTERNATIONAL ACTOR – INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Possible changes in the Asian power structure would heavily influence European interests, both abroad and at home. That is why this region requires greater attention, and ideally also a common coherent strategy like the one applied by the US. However, at the heart of the EU's insufficient presence in the Asia Pacific lie various deep structural and institutional problems. One of them is associated with the way the EU's external actions are being decided. While discussing the EU foreign policy it is important to bear in mind that the EU is not a single state but a hybrid construction, within which the decisions are taken on various levels (national, intergovernmental, supranational) by various actors (Member States, EU institutions). The foreign policy of the EU is not a simple outcome of all Member States' foreign policies. Besides acting within the EU, each Member State (MS) acts also on its own outside of the EU. This creates a para-

²¹ W. Wohlforth, “Realism and foreign policy”, in: S. Smith, A. Hadfield, T. Dunne (eds.), *Foreign policy. Theories, actors, cases*, Oxford 2012.

²² M. Pollack, “Theorizing the European Union: realist, intergovernmentalist and institutionalist approaches”, in: E. Jones, A. Menon, S. Weatherill (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of the European Union*, Oxford 2011.

²³ C. Glaser, “The security dilemma revisited”, *World Politics*, vol. 50, no. 1 (1997), pp. 171-201.

²⁴ J. Snyder, “Averting anarchy in the new Europe,” *International Security*, vol. 14, no. 4 (1990), pp. 5-41, [online] DOI: 10.2307/2538749.

dox where Member State's interests are represented both by itself and by the EU while the MS foreign policy does not always stand in line with the one expressed by the EU. Contradictory messages sent to third actors on a given issue confuse them and undermine the EU's position as a broker for the Europe's interests as a whole. One prominent example is the EU's arms embargo against China which has been repeatedly broken by several European countries. In 2013, the governments of Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK, as well as their arms manufacturers continued to sell arms, or components for arms, to China²⁵. Even though the scale of the arms sales remains relatively small²⁶, and they result from interpretations of very vague EU guidelines²⁷, then still such lack of cohesion does not provide for a stronger international position of the EU and the European Commission as its representative.

Secondly, while Asia might not be the traditional direction of the EU external policy, for some of its member states it definitely is. Many of the former colonial powers still maintain lively relations with their ex-colonies and very often those are relations closely related to their national security. Especially the so-called "Big Three": UK, France and Germany have well-established presence in Asia and little interest in giving up their positions for the sake of the EU, which adds another challenge to the common Asian policy formulation. The Big Three involvement in Asia is far from promoted by the EU neutrality. That includes for example the United Kingdom's membership in the Five-Power Defence Arrangements (FDPA) which is a military consultation agreement between the UK, Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore. France, on the other hand, continues to have an operational military presence in the basin of the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific²⁸. Concurrently, defence and security issues in the EU still remain exclusive to the member states as they are considered to constitute the core of a state's sovereignty. Since they can be discussed only on the intergovernmental level, the EU supranational institutions can bring little to the discussion and have even less influence over the final decisions. As long as there is no strong military cooperation on the EU level or anything that could be called "an EU army", the EU has no bargaining power in the domain of hard security – a domain of a great importance in power balancing in the Asia Pacific, especially when facing the military capabilities of China or the United States.

Thirdly, from an institutional point of view, even though the first attempts to form the Common Foreign and Security Policy date back to Maastricht Treaty, only the most recent Lisbon Treaty provided for its sufficient institutional arrangements. Creation of the post of High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) and a few years later the establishment of the European External Action Service

²⁵ "Sixteenth Annual Report according to Article 8(2) of Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP defining common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment", *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 103 (27 March 2015).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ O. Bräuner, M. Bromley, M. Duchâtel, "Western arms exports to China", *SIPRI Policy Paper*, no. 43 (January 2015).

²⁸ N. Casarini, "The securitization of EU-Asia relations...", p. 189.

(EEAS) are key steps towards formulation, adoption and exercise of a common foreign policy. A diplomatic representation of the EU consisting of HR, EEAS and the established network of 139 EU's Delegations and offices around the world²⁹ help to improve the union's visibility in world affairs and ameliorate relations with economic and political partners. Even though the delegations already existed for some time before as economic representations of the European Commission, upgrading them to a diplomatic level undoubtedly helps to build the EU's coherent international presence³⁰. Furthermore, the role of the High Representative has been additionally enhanced by the current President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker. In his speech on the State of Union delivered to the European Parliament on 9 September 2015, he indicated that his Commission would break out from the “business as usual”³¹ and become a more “political commission”. This also meant putting a greater emphasis on strengthening the common voice outside of Europe. The foreign policy functions have been streamlined within the Commission through several innovations. For instance, the so-called “mission letters” have been introduced. Addressed to the HR in office, Federica Mogherini, give her *clear leadership to encourage the relevant commissioners to work in a consistent and coordinated fashion (...) [by] steering and coordinating the work of all Commissioners with regard to external relations*³².

On top of that, the Lisbon Treaty introduced a full-time position of the President of the European Council, now in the hands of former Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk. Among the other responsibilities, the President also ensures the external representation of the EU through cooperation with the High Representative on issues related to the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and through representation of the EU at international summits³³.

In the institutional freshness of the High Representative and the President of the European Council lie both their weakness and their strength. As new actors, their role in the international affairs is not fully defined yet. It has been only few years since the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty, so their real influence is still to be examined. On the other hand, there is a noteworthy potential that these institutions will grow into important political players who will be able to unify the Member States' voices and lead the EU towards a stronger and consistent international presence.

²⁹ European External Action Service Website, [online] http://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/index_en.htm, 12 December 2015.

³⁰ The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for drawing attention to this fact.

³¹ “This is not the time for business as usual. (...) It is time to speak frankly about the big issues facing the European Union. Because our European Union is not in a good state. There is not enough Europe in this Union. And there is not enough Union in this Union. We have to change this. And we have to change this now.”

³² M. Pierini, “The return of the European Commission to the foreign policy making?”, Carnegie Europe, 11 September 2014, [online] <http://www.carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=56597>, 2 December 2015.

³³ European Council Website, [online] <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/president/role/>, 13 December 2015.

3. EU ON THE OUTSIDE – RELATIONS WITH ASIA

The institutional framework of the European Union is just one part of the picture. The other one, indispensable if analysing the EU's position in the world, is how effective the established system is. Numerous crises that stroked the EU in the last decade have not left the EU external relations uninfluenced. Their "mis-" or even "dis-"management revealed the EU's political weakness and a visible lack of a strong leadership alongside with insufficient capacities to deliver fast and effective responses. The EU's preoccupation with current refugee and economic crises as well as with the stability in its neighbourhood, with an Ukrainian and Syrian conflict in particular still awaiting to be properly addressed, poses a troublesome question about the EU's ability to become more than just a regional power. Primary focus on the internal and regional affairs, as reflected in the latest Juncker's State of Union speech³⁴, somehow undermines the EU's aspiration and capability to become an established global player.

What has been done then in the area of the EU's policy towards Asia? First documents outlining an overall framework for EC relations with Asian countries date back to 1994 Communication "Towards a New Asia Strategy"³⁵. The document had two main objectives: to indicate a general direction to be followed in the EU relations with Asia and to build a more comprehensive framework for EU relations in this vast region. Since 1994, EU's political dialogue with key partners in the region has developed noticeably, both in a bilateral (through numerous partnership dialogues with key Asian economies) and multilateral manner (by summit dialogues in the Asia-Europe Meeting). Nevertheless, new geopolitical challenges call for a more comprehensive and strategic approach, which has not been delivered yet. European concerns for Asia's stability were only mildly expressed in the *European Security Strategy* (ESS) adopted by the European Council in 2003. The document states that *Problems such as those in Kashmir (...) and the Korean Peninsula impact on European interests directly and indirectly, as do conflicts nearer to home (...). Nuclear activities in North Korea, nuclear risks in South Asia, (...) are all of concern to Europe*³⁶. In 2008, in a special report on the ESS implementation, there is a recommendation to strengthen the capacity of the EU partners in South Asia³⁷, and few notes on improving cooperation with China and Japan³⁸. Those were rather modest mentions of importance of the Asian security issues to the EU. They were soon to be complemented by a distinctly big development in the EU's official approach towards Asia: *Guidelines on the EU's Foreign and Security Policy in*

³⁴ J. C. Juncker, *State of the Union*, speech delivered on 9 September 2015.

³⁵ *Communication from the Commission – Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships*, [online] www.eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52001DC0469, 4 VI 2016.

³⁶ European Council, *European Security Strategy*, 2003, pp. 4-6.

³⁷ *Report on implementation of the European security strategy – Providing security in a changing world*, 2008, p. 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 11.

East Asia, published in 2007 and in 2012. The newest issue provides a complex description of the EU's interests in Asia and the importance of the region for the EU's security as well as somewhat ambitious strategic guidelines for the region. The year 2012 was even declared in the EU as a "Year of Asia", by some called also a small "pivot"³⁹. Commercial diplomacy in Asia Pacific intensified and the number of ministerial visits to Asia rapidly increased⁴⁰. However, issues described in the previous section – misleading parallel signals from the EU and MS, visible lack of agreement between MS, lack of military capacity, institutionally weak representation of the EU, on-going crises, lack of one and clear policy towards Asia all significantly weaken the EU's position in relations with Asian countries. Bilateral relations still remain the most significant means of cooperation in Asia – the region where even regional integration is based on primacy of a state's integrity and sovereignty. In the environment where a nation state holds an incontestable primacy in the international affairs, the EU's "actorness" is doomed to be to some extent restricted by its non-state features.

There is, however, a great leverage on the Europeans' side, namely – their economic and trade power. By the end of 2011, the EU has become the Asia's second largest economic partner⁴¹. As of 2015, Concurrently, Asia accounts for more than 27% of Europe's global trade which is significantly higher than the current EU – trans-Atlantic trade (22.7%)⁴². Intensifying EU-Asia trade and investment relations has resulted in deeper interdependence also in monetary affairs, with stronger presence of Euro currency in Asia and a potential to replace the weakening US dollar⁴³. What is more, the EU is very sensitive to world markets for oil, raw materials and food; therefore the Asian steady economic growth and a stable expansion of its imports lie also in the EU's interest⁴⁴. Given the significance of Asia and Asian markets for the EU's economic security, the peace and stability in the region is essential to Europe's wellbeing. That includes also Asian states' internal political and economic stability and the security of sea trade routes on which Europe trade largely depends. The notion of securitization of economic relations in this respect provides justifiable rationale for the EU's security interests in Asia, even if the Asian states themselves recognize the EU primarily as an economic, not a security actor⁴⁵.

Existing strategic partnerships as well as on-going negotiations on free trade agreements are important channels for European involvement in Asia. There is only one free trade agreement already in force – with South Korea, concluded in 2010, one not yet

³⁹ R. Youngs, "Keeping EU-Asia reengagement on track", Carnegie Europe, January 2015, [online] http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/eu_asia_reengagement.pdf.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴¹ N. Casarini, "The securitization of EU-Asia relations...", p. 184.

⁴² Council of the European Union, *Guidelines on the EU's Foreign and Security Policy in East Asia*, 2012, p. 4.

⁴³ N. Casarini, "The securitization of EU-Asia relations...", p. 184.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁴⁵ N. Chaban et al., "Images of European Integration in Asia", in: T. Christiansen, E. Kirchner, P. Murray (eds.), *The Palgrave handbook...*

applied – with Singapore, and six others still in the negotiations phase – with China, Japan, India, Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand⁴⁶. Currently four Asian countries: Japan, China, India and South Korea are considered to be strategic partners. However, it is important to look at what this term means in practice as there have been many loose talks on EU-China, EU-India, EU-Japan and EU-Asia security cooperation or strategic partnerships not only on summit occasions⁴⁷. There is little evidence whether they helped to raise the EU's political and diplomatic profile. Probably the most fundamental problem is again the lack of clarity in the EU's political and security aspirations in Asia Pacific. Without a clear definition of what political, security and strategic interests the EU wants to or needs to defend and promote in relation to Asia, the EU's engagement with Asian powers will never go beyond the level of diplomatic courtesies⁴⁸.

In the Asian environment dominated by a Westphalian security culture⁴⁹, a post-Westphalian formation such as the EU needs to find a different role to play than a regular state would. The EU recognizes this challenge and that is why it is primarily active in economic and non-traditional security areas, which include various transnational threats from terrorism to pandemics, along with climate change and environmental degradation. Even though security in Asia is still viewed mostly in the terms of territorial integrity⁵⁰, there is a growing recognition for importance of “soft security”, which opens up new possibilities for the EU to become involved in the region.

However, non-traditional security matters important for Europeans do not earn the same recognition in Asia. Even though formally they are part of the agenda, in practice it is very often the subject to resistance⁵¹. Many Asian states are sympathetic to this topic but consider the EU understanding of soft security to be “too soft”. In the light of the US-China competition for strategic influence, Asian states consider the non-traditional security to be of rather marginal importance. Security is understood first of all as a matter of geopolitical balancing, not as a part of the non-traditional approaches⁵².

Acting as a normative power, the EU has already assisted the establishment of democratic regimes in Cambodia, East Timor and Afghanistan. The EU mediating capacities were also engaged in finding an agreement between Muslim population in Mindanao and the Manila-based government in the Philippines as well as between Indonesian government and Free Aceh Movement (GAM). The EU has been funding

⁴⁶ European Commission, *Memo: The EU's free trade agreements – where are we?*, Brussels 2013.

⁴⁷ M. Tsuruoka, “Defining Europe's strategic interests in Asia: state of things and challenges ahead”, *Studia Diplomatica: The British Journal of International Relations*, vol. 64, no. 3 (2011).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96.

⁴⁹ E. Kirchner, J. Sperling, *National security cultures. Patterns of global governance*, London–New York 2010.

⁵⁰ Y. L. Hwee, *The EU's role in shaping Asia's security*, “Global Europe”, 7 January 2014, [online] http://www.europesworld.org/2014/01/07/the-eus-role-in-shaping-asias-security/#.Vm5MI_l97IU, 3 December 2015.

⁵¹ R. Youngs, “Keeping EU-Asia reengagement...”

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

projects and initiatives aimed at supporting the protection of human rights, spreading of democracy, good governance and the rule of law in the region. There also has been on numerous occasions a substantial flow of humanitarian assistance from Europe to Asia, especially when major natural disasters occurred. That was the case in 2009, when heavy earthquakes took place in Indonesia, in 2011, when Japan was struck by the biggest earthquake in its history, in 2008 and 2010, when cyclones killed hundreds of thousands people in Myanmar, and most recently in Nepal, where in April and May 2015 two consequent earthquakes deprived more than 9 000 people of lives and another 600 000 of shelter⁵³.

The focus on humanitarian issue and state-failures contributed to the normative reputation of European security priorities. Meanwhile, domestic discussions between proponents of primacy of trade relations in the EU's external affairs and those who argue in favour of normative foreign policy has not delivered a recipe for the EU's approach towards Asia. The EU was criticized for its strong focus on trade and investment in Asia, while ignoring strategic security interests – most importantly, those threatened by the rise of China and its growing aggressive rhetoric. While Japan and South Korea repeat their calls for the EU's support in the South China Sea, the EU is trying to find its balance between its trade and economic interests in Asia through neutrality. Europe puts an emphasis on the cooperative nature of security engagement in Asia, with a focus on mutual security and greater involvement in non-traditional security issues.

Another distinctive feature of the EU's external relations is a commitment to effective multilateralism. Participation in international organizations and regional fora could provide even greater opportunities to the exercise of the EU's interests in the East. That is why ASEAN and ASEAN-associated summits remain the main target of the EU diplomacy. Even though the EU misses out on the most influential regional groupings, like East Asian Summit, ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+) or Six-Party talks on the North Korean nuclear program, through more active participation and engagement in other summits and meetings the EU might eventually earn its recognition. Most importantly, the EU needs to show its willingness to engage and ensure the partners about its non-hegemonic aspirations. Any sign of increasing economic or political power of the EU is welcomed with anxiety in Asia, as it recalls “imperialist” images of crusading European countries. This anxiety can catalyse a negative reaction towards negotiations and settlements with the EU⁵⁴.

The liberal Europeans believe that trade fosters peaceful relations by giving states an economic incentive to avoid war. This awakens a hope that growth in trade and investment between Asia and Europe will ultimately lead to a closer and friendlier cooperation. The same should apply then to the inter-Asian relations. However, history shows that this is not necessarily the case there. Asia is known for the security paradox where-by economic links do not prevent strained political relations quickly leading into sig-

⁵³ European Commission, Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Website, [online] ec.europa.eu/echo/index_en, 15 December 2015.

⁵⁴ T. Christiansen, E. Kirchner, P. Murray (eds.), *The Palgrave handbook...*, p. 24.

nificant economic costs and an escalation in military tensions. A tense relation between China and Japan does not seem to get warmer even though the two economies heavily depend on each other. Uncertainty and mistrust continue to be two main characteristic of Asian international environment.

The EU, while planning its involvement in Asia, should understand first Asian perspectives on international relations, which are still very much based on Hobbesian presumptions. Even regional integration in Asia proceeds in its own, unique way, different from European and frequently related to as “ASEAN way”. The principles of sovereignty and non-intervention remain cherished and guarded by all Asian states. Moreover, the sovereignty in Asia is understood as an exclusive power over state’s territory and internal affairs, which is essentially different from the constitutional sovereignty practised in the EU. Without getting rid of the normative agenda and giving up their protectionist approach towards Asian integration, it may prove to be hard for Europeans to earn Asians’ respect and trust.

4. EU AND/V.S. US – RETHINKING TRANSATLANTIC PARTNERSHIP

On the side of discussing the EU-Asia relations, it is essential to analyse the engagement of Europe’s oldest ally in the region. United States has a long-established political and military presence in the region which has been even strengthened after the fall of communism. In the post-Cold war era US continued to hold a global primacy in security-related fields, acting as a guarantor of peace and stability for both Asia and Europe. It was the US-led NATO that primarily filled the security vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe after the Soviet’s withdrawal, and it is still the US-led NATO that holds a military umbrella over the EU. In Asia, the US’ alliances and military presence are even more significant, given both the size of the US engagement and the actual role it plays providing stability in the region with over sixty on-going territorial disputes⁵⁵.

US is often perceived to be a counterbalance for the hegemonic aspirations of Beijing and a main security guarantor for countries threatened by either the rise of China or nuclear capacities development of North Korea. As argued by Michael Mastanduno, *American power and presence have helped to keep traditional power rivals in the region from engaging in significant conflict and have reassured smaller states who have traditionally been vulnerable to major regional wars*⁵⁶. In the Asian environment of increasing economic prosperity and decreasing political trust, US become a desired powerful ally. Not surprisingly, some traditional US supporters in the region, like Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, and South Korea, have well-functioning bilateral military treaties with US

⁵⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, “The world factbook”, [online] <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/index.html>, 28 January 2016.

⁵⁶ M. Mastanduno, “Incomplete hegemony: the United States and security order in Asia”, in: M. Alagappa (ed.), *Asian security order. Instrumental and normative features*, Stanford 2003, p. 143.

as well as its permanent military bases on their territory. According to official information provided by the Defense Manpower Data Center, in 2012 nearly 80 thousand troops were deployed in permanent bases just in Japan and South Korea⁵⁷. The US relations with Asia are conducted primarily bilaterally, according to the hub-and-spoke model, although Americans are also active in some multilateral groupings that remain out of reach for the EU. The US is a member of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, East Asian Summit and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM-Plus), the two latter ones being the most important forums for discussing security matters in Asia Pacific.

Competing with the US for the influence in the hard security domains would be not only pointless, taking into account the EU's lack of the military capacity, but also harmful for the EU's interests. In particular, the EU-China trade relations could suffer if the EU joins the American government in its policy of containment towards Beijing. Too close cooperation with the American superpower could result in overshadowing and thus weakening European position in the region. Moreover, the EU might end up tarred with the same brush as coercive US, thus losing its capacity to act as a neutral mediator and a promotor of peaceful solutions reached through multilateral consultations. So far, it seems that the US' and the EU's interests in Asia as well as their modus operandi are divergent; the rise of China identified as a major threat by Americans in the European context does not hold a security matter recognition. Furthermore, the EU does not consider China as a geopolitical rival; therefore the EU feels comfortable prioritizing trade promotion with Beijing. Nevertheless, the transatlantic partnership is still of a strategic importance for Europe, and therefore requires at least an approach towards other regions of the world which is to some extent common. In the official documents the EU mentions the United States as a crucial partner to promote stability and security in Asia and expresses their willingness to *develop its strategic dialogue on East Asia with the US*⁵⁸. However, EU leaders should remain conscious of the limitations to this partnership in Asia. The geographical distance from the Asia-Pacific, the lack of formal defence commitments there and the relatively low capacity to project military strategic power into the region can be turned into Europeans' advantage, strengthening their mediating security role by way of diplomacy and an emphasis on multilateralism and economic cooperation⁵⁹. Any other engagement could result in greater regional polarization and tensions as well as diminish the EU's credibility, limiting their diplomatic room of manoeuvre and possibilities to expand the economic ties to all parties.

⁵⁷ Defense Manpower Data Center, "Total Military Personnel and Dependent End Strength By Service, Regional Area, and Country", [online] http://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/rest/download?fileName=DRS_54601_309_Report_P1506.xlsx&groupName=milRegionCountry, 12 December 2015.

⁵⁸ Council of the European Union, *Guidelines on the EU's foreign and security policy in East Asia*, 11492/12, Brussels 2012, p. 9.

⁵⁹ L. Simón, "Europe, the rise of Asia...", pp. 969-989.

CONCLUSIONS: “THE UNBEARABLE WEIGHT OF NOT BEING”?

This article has analysed the EU's position in Asian relations and Asian power relations primarily through the lens of neorealist approach. According to this school, an international actor's power is measured through its capability of staying on the top of the power balancing game. The unique hybrid character of the European Union deprives it of some essential state-like features and generally complicates its position in the Asian Westphalian security environment. Nevertheless, the indisputable economic power of the EU and its well-developed expertise in non-traditional security matters as well as recent institutional developments provide for the EU's stronger international presence and growing power capacity. This potential needs to be well managed; meanwhile the EU suffers from leadership deficiency and lacks a strong, coherent strategy that could match the one of the United States.

As emphasized in this paper, there are many arguments for the EU's greater engagement in Asia Pacific. First of all, the rapid growth of China influences the economic and security environments around the world, including the regions that are traditionally included in the EU's neighbourhood policy. Also globalization makes the geographical distance much less significant, the distant East Asia cannot be treated as distant anymore. Moreover, some of the biggest EU's member states have their interests in the region and the EU's involvement could provide for their safe maintenance. The EU could act as a gain maximizer for the Big Three, who alone cannot counterbalance any of the major regional powers in Asia Pacific. Existing and potential strategic partnerships and trade agreements are important instruments for establishing EU's strong position in the region, as well as useful channels for communication with other states. Finally, recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of EU's external actions, the noteworthy proactivity in a non-traditional security matters, like humanitarian help or support for democratic transitions, could be considered as another pillar of the EU's presence in the region, right next to the economic one. Those actions provide opportunities for dialogue and partnership, as well as contribute to a stable and peaceful development of the region. The exercise of the normative power provide at the end for gradual transformation of the partners, so as the end it is much easier and more natural to find a common denominator in world affairs.

Meanwhile, the geopolitical shift of the US to Asia Pacific brought several new important implications for the EU. First of all, it recognizes significance of the region in a power balancing game; game that the EU as a potential (or aspiring?) global power cannot stay out of. Given the growing economic interdependence between Europe and East Asia as well as increasing influence of Asian powers in the “middle spaces”, it lays in the heart of the EU's economic and security interest to increase its political engagement in the region. Any changes in the Asian power structure could prove to be very troublesome at least and extremely harmful at most to the Europe's well-being.

Secondly, the “pivot” calls for the Europeans to overthink the role they want to play as the EU in world affairs. Is it possible to become a great power while lacking the hard security capabilities? The current stage of the European integration does not provide for a sufficient cooperation in the domain of hard security and that is not likely to

change in the nearest future. Therefore the EU's position as an economic power should be enhanced and perceived as a leverage provider in the international relations. It appears that the most optimal for the EU could be to strengthen its role as a neutral mediator and focus on economic and soft security issues. This though means that there will continue to be some limitations to the EU's position in the power relations which should be included in strategic planning.

Thirdly, the trans-Atlantic partnership needs to be rethought and reshaped so as it either contains common approach towards Asia or does not get in the way of the European interests in the region. A possible escalation of the US-China race for the influence requires a common and comprehensive response of the EU Member States. It might pose some demanding challenges to the old Europe-US alliance and the role it plays in the European security. This, however, could also be reduced to the question of the role intended for the EU in global politics. If the EU was to be – as other actors in the neorealist approach – a game maximizer, it cannot fully reject, even if it is revolutionary, the idea of a divorce with an American partner.

Most importantly, however, the “pivot” to Asia Pacific requires the EU to realize that it cannot afford missing out on the development of the situation in Asia. Be it or not a beginning of an “Asia century”, the economic rise of some Asian states cannot be denied. As argued in the article, any sudden unfavourable developments in this fast-paced region could irreversibly damage the EU's economic power. That is why the primary thing for the EU is to be proactive in Asian affairs. Even though there is a visible lack of agreement on what role the EU can/should play in the region, the absence in Asia remains the more costly solution. Fostering closer political relations, both bilaterally and multilaterally, is a key to the region. Lack of interest and commitment would condemn the EU to a political nonexistence. As concluded in 2009 by François Heisbourg in his analysis of the EU's security policy issues: *Notwithstanding its current limits and constraints, the EU's ability to become an actor in defence and security will probably continue to develop for fear of worse: “the weight of not being” is simply unbearable*⁶⁰. This applies likewise to political presence in Asia Pacific: if the EU will not matter in Asia, will it matter at all? The risk is too high to be taken.

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