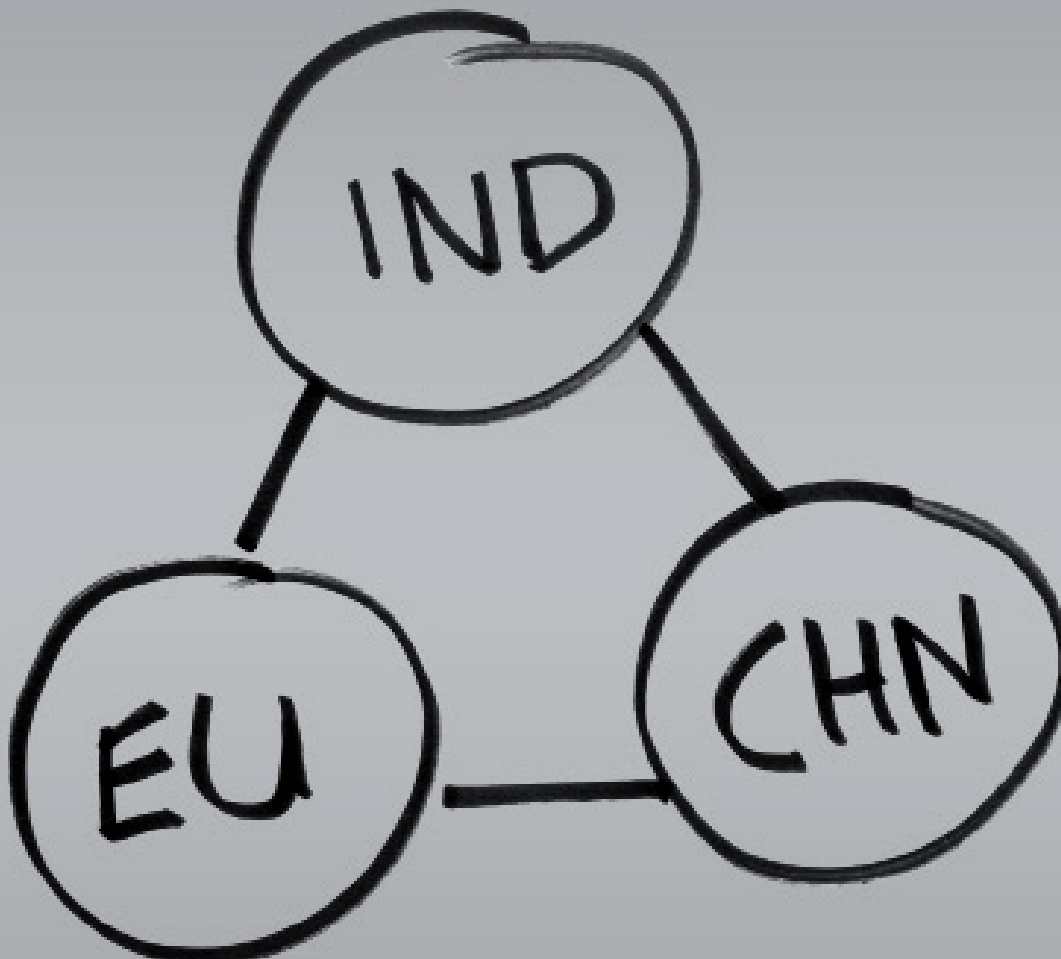


A NOVEL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF EU FOREIGN POLICY IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD:

The Case of EU-China-Africa Relations

Anna Stahl

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Abstract

The world is becoming increasingly multipolar, mainly due to the economic and geopolitical rise of a group of emerging countries, particularly China. This international transition bears major consequences for the European Union (EU), which sees its international position becoming increasingly challenged. The EU has started to redefine its foreign policy and reach out to new strategic partners, such as China and Africa, in order to remain a relevant international player. The current transition towards a multipolar world order also presents a challenge for European foreign policy research. So far, the academic literature has only focused marginally on conceptualising the EU's changing international role. This paper addresses the theoretical gap in the literature on European foreign policy (EFP) and proposes a new analytical framework for the study of the EU in a changing global order. The framework proposed in this paper is centred around the concept of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) and presents an attempt to move away from an inward-looking analysis to a conceptual framework that integrates the EU's strategic partners into the study of European foreign policy. The empirical trend of EU-China-Africa relations serves as the main case study for testing the analytical tool of CSP.

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Keywords

Africa, China, EU, EU Foreign Policy, Multipolar World, Strategic Partners

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1. Introduction¹

A key characteristic of the current multipolar world order is the interdependence of a growing number of international actors. The rise of emerging countries like China and their growing international presence in other parts of the world, such as Africa, contributes to undermining the international dominance of traditional players such as the United States (US) and the European Union (EU). The emergence of a more diversified set of international actors has raised calls for new theoretical approaches to studying international politics. In recent years, International Relations (IR) research has therefore been exposed to growing criticism for being a Western- or Eurocentric discipline (Power and Mohan 2011; Waever and Tickner 2009). According to these critics, IR scholarship is rooted in a particular historical experience and environment and largely fails to include “non-Western” sources of knowledge. For instance, IR theory is based on the concept of state sovereignty and the fundamental understanding of the Westphalian state as the main driver of modernisation. Yet, this theoretical perspective neglects the realities of many non-Western countries, in which a variety of different communities and tribes outside the boundaries of nation-states contribute to economic and political developments. Consequently, IR scholars have undertaken increasing efforts to reconsider the “I” in IR (Jones 2003). As part of this self-critical reflection of IR scholarship, academics have started paying more attention to non-Western scholarly work (Power and Mohan 2011). In particular, IR scholars have engaged in a more thorough analysis of Asian perspectives of International Relations (Acharya 2008; Geeraerts and Men 2001; Kang 2003; Shambaugh and Yahuda 2008).

In the same way that the field of IR has been exposed to growing criticism for being a Western-centric discipline, an increasing number of researchers have deplored the strong Eurocentric bias of EU scholarship (Shambaugh and Yahuda 2008). Yet, in the context of the current transition towards a multipolar order, some European foreign policy (EFP) scholars have engaged in efforts to formulate new theoretical perspectives of the EU’s international role and started to adopt a more outward-looking research perspective. So far, three new EFP research agendas have emerged in response to current international shifts: the literature on external perceptions of the EU (Chaban and Holland 2008; Lucarelli and Fioramonti 2010; Ortega 2004; Torney 2013; Stumbaum 2012a), broader contributions on the EU’s international role in a multipolar world order (Keukeleire and Bruyninckx 2011; Kappel 2011; Renard and Biscop 2010) and the EU’s relations with emerging countries and the scholarship on EU strategic partnerships (Gratius 2011; Grevi 2012; Grevi and Vasconcelos 2008; Renard 2010; Stumbaum 2012). However, despite the development of these new EFP research agendas, a single theoretical lens for the study of EU foreign policy in a multipolar world is still missing. In fact, all three research strands face major limitations and none of them have been able to propose a clear theoretical foundation for the study of EU foreign policy in a changing world. Instead, most of the recent EFP contributions are largely driven by

¹ This NFG Working Paper is part of a larger research project based at the Freie Universität Berlin, the NFG Research Group “Asian Perceptions of the EU” (www.asianperceptions.eu), an Associated Project of the KFG Research College “The Transformative Power of Europe” (www.transformeurope.eu), from which we have greatly benefitted.

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empirical observation.

In view of addressing this gap in the literature, this paper proposes a novel analytical framework for studying the role of the EU in the multipolar world order. From among the different attempts by EFP scholars to provide new theoretical narratives for the EU in a multipolar world, the literature on EU strategic partnerships presents the most comprehensive theoretical account thus far. It provides the groundwork for the novel analytical framework developed in this paper, based on the notion of *Comprehensive Strategic Partnership*.

The analytical framework outlined in this paper was elaborated in the context of a Ph.D. thesis examining the relations between the EU, China and Africa (Stahl 2013). For this reason, this paper takes the example of the growing interaction between the EU, China and Africa in the field of development cooperation as the empirical foundation for the formulation of its new framework for analysis.

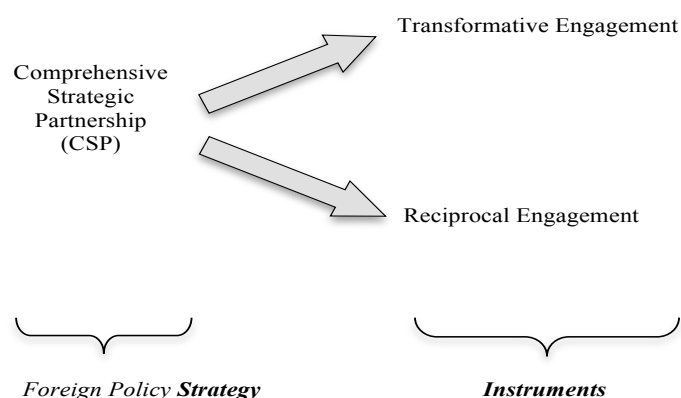
As a consequence of China's rise, the EU started paying more attention to China's growing influence in Africa around 2005, adopting a pro-active foreign policy response to the increase of Sino-African relations. In particular, EU policymakers have made efforts to adjust the EU's relations with China and Africa in the area of development cooperation (Grimm 2008; Grimm 2014; Grauls and Stahl 2010; Hackenesch 2009). Against this background, this paper follows three objectives. First, it provides a basis for the formulation of a new analytical framework of EFP study. The purpose of this new framework for analysis lies in the fact that it identifies a set of elements that make the EU a more successful international actor. Second, this paper contributes to initial studies examining new empirical evidence on the growing trend of exchange between European, Chinese and African foreign policy and development actors (Alden and Sidiropoulos 2009; Austermann 2012; Bach 2008; Barton 2009; Berger and Wissenbach 2007; Carbone 2011; Castillejo 2013; Fues et al. 2006; Grauls and Stahl 2010; Grimm 2008; Grimm and Hackenesch 2012; Hackenesch 2009; Hofmann et al. 2007; Huliaras and Magliveras 2008; Jakobson and Wood 2012; Liu 2011; Men and Barton 2011; Stahl 2011; Tywuschik 2007; Wissenbach 2009; Wissenbach 2011). It thereby lays the foundations for a new research agenda on EU-China-Africa relations. Finally, this paper fosters interdisciplinary research. By introducing the notion of Trilateral Development Cooperation (TDC), the paper goes beyond the conventional separation between IR research and development studies.

To do so, the paper is structured around three main sections. The first two sections will develop the analytical framework, whereas the last section will apply the new framework of analysis to the empirical case study of EU-China-Africa relations. The next section 2 starts by outlining the key elements of the conceptual framework, namely the notions of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and EU engagement. Taking the empirical example of the EU's relations with China and Africa, section 3 then integrates these two strategic partners into the framework of analysis of EU foreign policy. It makes a distinction between three levels of comprehensive strategic relations (e.g. coordination, cooperation and Comprehensive Strategic Partnership), and three forms of comprehensive strategic relations between the EU and its strategic partners (e.g. bilateralism, multilateralism and trilateralism).

2. Key Determinants of the Conceptual Framework of EU Foreign Policy

This section presents the two key components of a novel conceptual framework for the study of EU foreign policy in a multipolar world. These are a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and EU engagement. The figure below shows that the two elements have to be situated within the broader EU foreign policymaking process. The analytical framework distinguishes between three elements of EU foreign policymaking: strategy, instruments and mechanisms. Foreign policy strategy represents the starting point of the EU's foreign policy formulation. Once a strategy has been formulated, it is implemented through foreign policy instruments which are based on specific mechanisms. It is important to stress that these two elements represent a so-called "ideal type" of foreign policymaking which does not necessarily match with empirical reality. In fact, there are several examples in which the formulation of an EU foreign policy strategy was the end-product rather than the starting point. The following two subsections will outline the two main elements of the analytical framework in more detail.

Figure 1: Two Elements of EU Foreign Policymaking



Source: Compiled by the author.

2.1 EU Foreign Policy Strategy: Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

Defining EU foreign policy strategy represents a major challenge. The general term *strategy* has been used at various points in time, in different cultural settings and by a variety of different individuals. In the 1980s, the concept of strategy entered the school of International Relations. Whereas some IR strategic scholarship was inspired by military studies (Clausewitz 1976), other research was based on the work undertaken by economists belonging to the school of game theory (Axelrod 1984; Keohane 1984; Lipson 1984; Snidal 1985; Stein 1982). According to game theorists, International Relations can be represented in terms of a game with two or more players. In this game, the outcome of one player's decision depends not only on its own choice from among several options, but also on the choices made by the player(s) with whom it is interacting. Hence, the

EU's foreign policy strategy refers to the options it can choose in a setting where the outcome depends not only on its own actions, but on the actions of other international actors.

In addition to general IR interpretation, the notion of EU foreign policy strategy has to be seen in the light of the specific features of the European Union as an international actor. The adoption of the European Security Strategy (ESS) in 2003 sparked a debate among European policymakers and researchers on the necessity of a common European foreign policy strategy beyond the strategies of individual EU member states (Council of the EU 2003). In the subsequent report on the implementation of the ESS adopted in 2008, officials and scholars from different European member states further debated about the strategic substance of European foreign policy and tried to identify a set of guiding principles and long-term priority areas that should drive the EU's external actions (Bendiek and Kramer 2010; Renard and Biscop 2010).

Considering these two approaches to EU foreign policy strategy, the notion can be defined in terms of a general plan of action or policy designed to achieve an overall foreign policy aim. Hence, EU foreign policy strategy consists of the overall foreign policy objectives EU policymakers want to reach. Taking game theory into account, it is important to stress that in order to address a number of global objectives the EU needs to adopt a foreign policy strategy which involves the cooperation of other international actors or so-called "strategic partners" (Council of the EU 2003). Following the overall definition of EU foreign policy strategy, we will now turn to the specific case of the EU Foreign Policy Strategy of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. In this framework Comprehensive Strategic Partnership consists of the overall goal or objective towards which EU foreign policy strategy is directed. Overall, the notion of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership is conceived as a tool to provide a more balanced account of the different international players contributing to the current transition to a multipolar world. In particular, by introducing the novel analytical tool of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, the analytical framework tries to include an assessment of the EU's strategic partners in the analysis of EU foreign policy. The literature on EU foreign policy refers to the EU's strategic partner as "a key global player which has a pivotal role in solving global challenges" (Renard 2010, 4). Hence, the EU needs to engage in a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in order to solve international challenges, which it cannot address by itself. The concept of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership is therefore based on the idea of *interdependence*. Whereas the expression strategic partnership refers to an interdependence of actors, the term comprehensive describes the interdependence between various policy areas.

In sum, this framework defines the EU foreign policy strategy of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership as a foreign policy strategy aimed at reaching out to a variety of strategic partners in order to minimise potential disruptive behaviour. This cooperative agenda follows both objectives of solving concrete, common global challenges and diffusing European norms and good practices in a variety of policy areas.

2.2 EU Foreign Policy Instruments: Two Types of Engagement

Once EU policymakers have agreed on the formulation of an overall strategy with which to guide EU foreign policy, the second stage of EU foreign policymaking involves the selection of adequate policy instruments for the implementation of the foreign policy strategy. Policy instruments commonly describe specific techniques, tools or methods used by policymakers to achieve certain policy objectives. Hence, EU foreign policy instruments are specific foreign policy tools used by EU policymakers to implement the overall EU foreign policy strategy.

International Relations literature distinguishes between two broad categories of foreign policy instruments: engagement and containment (Casarini 2006; Edelstein 2002, 39; Kennan 1984; Shambaugh 1996; Wang 2002). Each category of policy instruments is related to a different foreign policy strategy. Containment is based on the assumption that uncertainty about the foreign policy strategies of other international actors can only be countered by a competitive foreign policy strategy to deter the other actors (Herberg-Rothe 2013). The meaning of engagement can be derived from the verb 'engage', which expresses the action of getting involved or becoming interlocked. The term 'engagement' therefore refers to a foreign policy instrument associated with a cooperative foreign policy strategy (Edelstein 2002; Lynch 2002; Paulson Jr. 2008; Perry and Carter 1998; Resnick 2011; Shambaugh 1996).

Although the notion of containment was primarily used to describe international politics during the Cold War era, it still constitutes an important part of the contemporary IR vocabulary (Herberg-Rothe 2013). Hence, in current IR scholarship, the concepts of engagement and containment are equally present (Shambaugh 1996; Wang 2002). Instead, in EFP literature the notion of engagement is much more widespread (Casarini 2006; Fox and Godement 2009; Grimm and Hackenesch 2012; Vogt 2012; Youngs 2005). EFP scholars generally associate the policy instrument of engagement with the EU's foreign policy attempts at forging partnerships with international actors (Casarini 2006; Fox and Godement 2009). Due to the fact that this analytical framework specifically considers EU foreign policy, it suggests that EU engagement represents the overarching policy instrument for the achievement of the EU foreign policy strategy of CSP.

Within the broad category of EU engagement, European policymakers have the choice between more specific types of policy instruments. Scholars refer to these in terms of "instrumental engagement" (Youngs 2005), "unconditional" and "reciprocal engagement" (Fox and Godement 2009). These different types of EU engagement embody alternative ways of reaching the overall foreign policy goal of CSP. In fact, the selection of one type of policy instrument over another within the implementation of a broader strategy represents the essence of foreign policy decision-making.

The novel analytical framework presented in this paper proposes a typology of two types of EU engagement, thereby giving EU policymakers the choice between two possible ways to achieve the overall objective of a CSP. As outlined in the table below, the two ideal types of EU policy instruments consist of transformative EU engagement and reciprocal EU engagement. The two types of policy instruments are driven by different underlying assessments of how the EU can best build a CSP with its strategic partners.

Table 1: EU Foreign Policy Instruments

Typology of EU Foreign Policy Instruments	
Transformative Engagement	Reciprocal Engagement
EU > Strategic Partners (One-way process)	EU <> Strategic Partners (Two-way process)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EU pursues a set of predetermined interests and norms • Unilateral adaptation of the strategic partners to the EU • The EU as “norm/policy maker” and strategic partner as “norm/policy taker” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EU is ready to change its initial interests and norms • Mutual adaptation of both the EU and strategic partners

Source: Compiled by the author

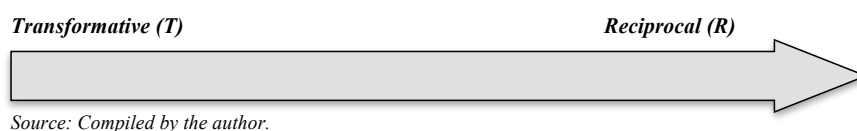
The meaning of transformative engagement can be derived from EFP literature and the concepts of EU transformative power (Börzel and Risse 2009; Grabbe 2006) and normative power (Manners 2002). These two notions express the EU’s ability to diffuse certain norms and procedures to other parts of the world and thereby change them. In line with the EFP literature, the analytical framework conceives that the transformative engagement is defined as an EU foreign policy instrument aimed at building a CSP between the EU and strategic partners on the basis of norms and interests which the EU defines as international standards. Through transformative engagement, EU policymakers try to modify the behaviour and interests of the strategic partners and make them more similar to those of the EU. Transformative engagement can therefore be described as a process of unilateral policy adaptation or norm transfer initiated by the EU. In this process, the EU acts as the so-called “norm-maker” and the strategic partners as the so-called “norm-takers”. This implies that that EU’s interest and norms are not altered under the influence of the strategic partners, but rather stay the same.

According to the typology of EU engagement outlined above, the opposite of transformative engagement is reciprocal engagement. The term ‘reciprocity’ is widely used in IR literature. According to the general definition provided by Robert O. Keohane, reciprocity refers to “exchanges of roughly equivalent values in which the actions of each party are contingent on the prior actions of the other” (Keohane 2009, 8). This definition highlights the link between *reciprocity* and the notions of *equivalence* or *mutuality*. In the context of the current transition to a multipolar world, the term ‘reciprocity’ has been interpreted in terms of a growing equality of emerging powers in relation to traditional Western players. According to this interpretation, reciprocity describes the formulation of new international rules, standards and objectives on the basis of “mutual adaptation efforts”, by both “old” or “traditional” global players like the EU and “new stakeholders” (Stanzel 2008, 256). In this context, scholars have introduced the concept of reciprocal socialisation, arguing that socialisation cannot be perceived as a “one-way process” driven solely by Western players, but should be seen in terms of an interaction between equal players (Terhalle 2011). Moreover, they have emphasised that socialisation implies a “two-way process”, in which current international norms are increasingly reshaped under the growing influence of emerging countries (Xiaoyun 2012).

In accordance with current IR literature, the analytical framework defines reciprocal engagement as an EU foreign policy instrument directed at forming a CSP between the EU and strategic partners on the basis of common norms and interests. In contrast to transformative engagement, which is conceived as a one-way process driven exclusively by the EU, reciprocal engagement is characterised by a mutual adaptation of both the EU and strategic partners.

It is important to stress that although the analytical framework refers to two ideal types of EU engagement, EU foreign policy instruments only rarely correspond to either one or the other of the two ideal types. Instead, as illustrated by figure 2, EU foreign policy instruments tend rather to reflect a certain degree of reciprocal or transformative engagement. Figure 2 shows that the scale for measuring EU foreign policy instruments ranges from a purely transformative type of engagement to a purely reciprocal form of engagement. Traditionally, EU foreign policy takes the form of transformative engagement, while reciprocal engagement corresponds to a relatively novel EU foreign policy instrument. Hence, the arrow in figure 2 moves from transformative to reciprocal engagement.

Figure 2: Two Types of EU Engagement



3. Integrating the EU's Strategic Partners China and Africa into the Framework

Even though this analytical framework primarily revolves around the position of the EU in the current international system, there is no doubt that EU foreign policy cannot be accurately examined without taking into account other international players. This is particularly true for the study of the current EU foreign policy strategy of CSP. The idiomatic expression “it takes two to tango” can serve as a good description of the underlying rationale of the CSP between the EU and its strategic partners. Similar to tango, the general concept of CSP refers to a situation in which two partners are by definition understood to be essential. Consequently, the EU foreign policy strategy aimed at the formation of a CSP cannot be assessed on the exclusive basis of the viewpoint of the EU. Instead, the study of current EU foreign policy requires a careful appraisal of the position of the EU's partners.

This second section, therefore, moves away from the narrow viewpoint of EU foreign policymaking outlined in the previous section to a broader perspective on the comprehensive strategic relations between the EU and its strategic partners, China and Africa. In particular, this section studies the conditions under which a CSP can be reached between the EU and other actors, such as China and Africa.

In recent years, the notion of strategic partnership has entered both European policy discourse (Council of the EU 2003; European Commission 2004a; European Commission 2004b; European Commission 2006), as well as European foreign policy research (Gratius 2011; Grevi 2012; Renard 2010; Stumbaum 2012). At the same time, also non-European policymakers and scholars have started referring to so-called “strategic partnerships” in the academic literature as well as in Chinese and African policy discourse (African Union 2012; Alden 2008; Masuda 2000; Muekalia 2004; Pan 2012; Zhang 2010). This shows that - contrary to common assumption - the notion of strategic partnership does not correspond to a purely Western or European concept. Instead, it shows that the notion of strategic partnership has become a widely accepted analytical tool for describing the current shift in international relations involving a growing number of different international players. Moreover, the concept of strategic partnership reflects the diminishing dominance of the West in general and of the EU in particular due to the emergence of new international players. Although the European policy discourse and academic literature on strategic partnerships is more advanced than that of China and Africa, neither European policymakers nor the European scholarly community have so far been able to put forward any clear criteria as to which actors qualify for this status. This explains why there is no comprehensive list of the EU’s strategic partners.

In order to overcome the lack of a commonly accepted classification of the EU’s strategic partners, the analytical framework introduces the novel concept of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) between the EU and other international actors. The CSP is based on two main criteria. The first criterion concerns the “strategic” element and highlights the fact that an actor can only be considered “strategic” if its contribution is essential to solving global challenges (Renard 2010, 4). Yet, it is important to stress that in the context of the current global power shifts, this analytical framework conceptualises strategic partners primarily in terms of actors which have only recently reached the status of global players. They are commonly referred to as emerging countries or rising powers, which include China, India, Brazil and South Africa (Grevi and Khandekar 2011). The second criterion is related to the “comprehensive” nature of the EU’s relations with its strategic partners. According to this characteristic, it is not sufficient for an actor to have reached global importance in one particular policy field to be considered a strategic partner. Instead, an actor can only be considered a strategic partner if it behaves as a global player in a variety of different policy areas and is engaged in comprehensive strategic relations with the EU.

On the basis of these two criteria, the framework distinguishes between two broad categories of strategic partners with the EU: emerging countries and emerging regions. Traditionally, European scholars and policymakers have used the concept of strategic partnership to describe the EU’s bilateral relations with third countries. Whereas little controversy exists over which third countries qualify as strategic partners of the EU, a debate emerged over the possibility of establishing strategic partnerships between the EU and other regional organisations. This broader interpretation of the notion of EU strategic partnerships is reflected in the 2003 European Security Strategy, which refers to the EU’s inter-regional relationships with Africa, Latin America and Asia in terms of strategic partnerships (Council of the EU 2003). Hence, several scholars have argued that EU strategic partnerships are embedded in the EU’s broader inter-regional relations (Bendiek and Kramer 2010; Schmidt 2010).

The analytical framework presented in this paper focuses primarily on China and Africa as two strategic partners of the EU. The choice for China can be justified by the fact that among the four emerging countries, China is considered the most influential player (Beckley 2011; Goldstein 2001; Ikenberry 2008; Legro 2007; Shambaugh 2005) and European foreign policymakers have therefore made particular efforts to expand the EU's foreign policy with China. This has been demonstrated by the fact that China was the first of the four emerging countries to be officially labelled as a "strategic partner" of the EU in 2003 (European Commission 2003). At the same time, Chinese policymakers (Masuda 2000) and academics (Pan 2012; Stumbaum and Wei 2012; Zhang 2010) have also started using the notion of strategic partnership (*zhanlue huoban guanxi*) to describe the bilateral diplomatic relationship between China and other major powers. In fact, similarly to their European counterparts, Chinese foreign policymakers refer to their relationship with the EU as a "comprehensive strategic partnership" (Chinese Government 2014). This shows that - contrary to common assumption - the notion of strategic partnership does not correspond to a purely Western or European concept.

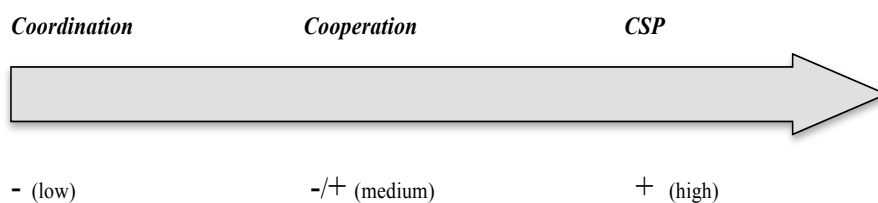
In parallel to strategic partnerships between the EU and emerging countries like China, the analytical framework presented in this paper also defines inter-regional relations between the EU and other regional organisations in terms of a CSP. In particular, it places emphasis on Africa as a strategic partner of the EU. In fact, in the context of current shifts in the international order of things, the role of the African continent is changing considerably. While Africa has long been a region primarily under the external influence of foreign powers (Engel and Olsen 2005; Taylor 2010), there are some signs pointing towards the fact that growing global multipolarity is strengthening African agency (Brown and Harman 2013; Dietz et al. 2011; Mohan and Lampert 2013). There are two elements contributing to Africa's transition towards being a more independent and strategic player on the world stage. First, the foundation of the African Union (AU) in 2002 as a regional organisation has allowed African countries to begin speaking with a single voice in international negotiations and to start formulating a common foreign policy towards its external partners. It therefore comes as no surprise that in 2007 EU policymakers decided to build a continental EU-Africa Strategic Partnership with the African Union (Council of the EU 2007). Moreover, similar to European and Chinese policy discourse, African decision-makers have started formulating a foreign policy rhetoric centred on strategic partnerships. For instance, recent policy documents of the African Union frequently used the concept of strategic partnerships to describe the diversification of the AU's international partners (African Union 2012). Furthermore, scholars in the field of African studies have also started referring to the concept of strategic partnership (Alden 2008; Muekalia 2004).

This section is divided into two subsections. The first subsection assesses the nature of the comprehensive strategic relations between the EU and its strategic partners, China and Africa. To this end, it offers a precise scale of measurement for the general concept of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. In addition to CSP, the scale introduces coordination and cooperation as two alternative levels of comprehensive strategic relations. Later, subsection 3.2 draws attention to three particular forms or configurations of comprehensive strategic relations between the EU and its strategic partners, namely the bilateral, multilateral and trilateral settings.

3.1 Three Levels of EU-China-Africa Comprehensive Strategic Relations

After having identified China and Africa as potential strategic partners of the EU, the following two subsections will conceptualise the nature of the comprehensive strategic relations between the EU and its strategic partners, China and Africa. This subsection starts by introducing a measurement scheme for three levels of comprehensive strategic relations between the EU and its strategic partners. As illustrated by figure 3, the three levels of interaction between the EU and the strategic partners are coordination, cooperation and CSP.

Figure 3: Three Levels of Comprehensive Strategic Relations between the Strategic Partners and the EU



Source: Compiled by the author.

3.1.1 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)

Drawing on the general definition of CSP put forward in subsection 2.1 of this paper, this subsection puts forward a set of specific criteria for defining the CSP between the strategic partners and the EU. These five constitutive conditions of CSP are summarised in table 2. In general, the formation of a CSP begins by informal ad hoc exchanges between the EU and the strategic partners, which later turn into more regular formal discussions. These discussions can translate into an informal consensus or an official agreement over common principles and standards. Finally, a CSP is directed towards a concrete output, which commonly takes the shape of joint projects between the strategic partners and the EU. It is important to stress that only if the interaction between the EU and its strategic partners corresponds to all five criteria can the EU foreign policy strategy of CSP be regarded as successful.

Table 2: The Five Criteria for Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships

Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)	
1.	Informal, ad hoc exchanges
2.	Formal, regular discussions (e.g. regular policy dialogues)
3.	Informal consensus on common concepts, practices and objectives
4.	Official agreement (e.g. policy document, Memorandum of Understanding)
5.	Concrete joint projects

3.1.2 *Coordination and Cooperation*

Due to the fact that all five criteria have to be met, the formation of a CSP represents an ambitious undertaking. Taking into account the challenges faced by the EU and the strategic partners to engaging in such a far-reaching interaction, this framework proposes two alternative levels of comprehensive strategic relations, namely coordination and cooperation. In the academic literature, the notions of coordination and cooperation are generally regarded as less intensive stages of interaction than a strategic partnership (Sasaoka and Nishimura 2006, 58). Scholars have therefore stressed that the notion of strategic partnerships suggests an “upgrade” in the relations between the EU and the specific partners (Baroowa 2007, 747).

As outlined by the figure below, the analytical framework introduces a scale of three levels of comprehensive strategic relations, ranging from coordination to CSP. Coordination corresponds to the lowest level of comprehensive strategic relations, while CSP represents the most intense form of exchange between the strategic partners and the EU. Cooperation stands for an intermediate stage between coordination and CSP.

Whereas the distinction between CSP and the two other forms of comprehensive strategic relations seems straightforward, the difference between coordination and cooperation is more difficult to apprehend. This framework draws on both IR theory and the development studies literature to distinguish between the two analytical tools. The conceptual distinction between cooperation/collaboration and coordination reflects a major theoretical controversy in IR theory from the 1970s. This debate was primarily driven by scholars studying the relation between international actors through the analytical lenses of game theory (Axelrod 1984; Keohane 1984; Lipson 1984; Snidal 1985; Stein 1982). According to game-theoretical terminology, the concepts of coordination and cooperation refer to two different games between two players.

In what are known as coordination games, two players pursue non-conflicting interests and multiple equilibrium outcomes are possible. Hence, coordination games refer to a situation in which all players realise mutual gains. The challenge of the coordination game, therefore, is to mutually agree on a possible equilibrium. “Once an equilibrium has been established by convention or by agreement, neither player has an incentive to defect from it” (Martin 1992, 775). By contrast, collaboration games or cooperation problems refer to a game in which the dominant strategy of the two players gives rise to “situations in which equilibrium outcomes are suboptimal” (Martin 1992, 769), i.e. both players would receive higher payoffs if they cooperated, but such cooperation does not arise naturally, as both players have an incentive to deviate from the cooperation strategy. This situation clearly arises, among others, in the well-known example of the prisoner’s dilemma (Snidal 1985). Both players must agree to reject their dominant strategy and to move away from the socially suboptimal equilibrium. However, in such situations, players have “strong incentives to defect from established cooperative patterns of behaviour, since defection results in immediate payoffs” (Martin 1992, 770).

When comparing the coordination game with the collaboration game, it is apparent that, in practice, a situation of collaboration/cooperation is more difficult to achieve than that of coordination. James Caporaso notes that, “in coordination games, actors have a strong incentive to reach an agreement and do not have an incentive to depart from it once it has been reached” (Caporaso 1992, 611). By contrast, for cooperation

to be successful, institutions are required to monitor the compliance with the agreed outcome (Keohane 1984). Hence, in cooperation, the enforcement of agreed rules is crucial. The players need to find a new set of rules in order to make defection an unprofitable strategy.

In line with the fundamental distinction between coordination and cooperation made by IR scholars, the novel analytical framework outlined here defines coordination as a less intense form of interaction compared to cooperation. On the basis of the five criteria for CSPs, a measurement scheme of three levels of interaction between the strategic partners and the EU is formulated. The three-level scale, which is displayed in table 3, allows a measurement of the three levels of comprehensive strategic relations. Whereas CSP is based on five criteria, cooperation only requires three and coordination two. Coordination entails regular discussions, dialogues, exchanges and consultations between European representatives and their strategic partners. By contrast, cooperation represents an attempt at finding a compromise between different interests. It can take the form of an informal or formal agreement over the terminology or rules for tackling global challenges. Yet, when compared to CSP, cooperation does not involve the concrete implementation of joint projects.

Table 3: Measurement Scheme for the Three Levels of Comprehensive Strategic Relations

	<i>Coordination</i>	<i>Cooperation</i>	<i>Comprehensive Strategic Partnership</i>
Informal, ad hoc exchanges	✓	✓	✓
Formal, regular discussions (e.g. regular policy dialogues)	✓	✓	✓
Informal consensus on common concepts, practices and objectives	✗	✓	✓
Official agreement (e.g. policy document, Memorandum of Understanding)	✗	✗	✓
Concrete joint projects	✗	✗	✓

✓ = existent

✗ = missing

3.2 Three Forms of EU-China-Africa Comprehensive Strategic Relations

In addition to the three levels of comprehensive strategic relations outlined in the previous subsection, the analytical framework also discerns between three forms or configurations of comprehensive strategic relations. These three forms reflect different international settings or venues in which the strategic partners and the EU can interact. As outlined in the table below, the three forms are defined as bilateralism, multilateralism and trilateralism.

Table 4: Three Forms of Comprehensive Strategic Relations

Comprehensive Strategic Relations		
<i>Bilateralism</i>	<i>Multilateralism</i>	<i>Trilateralism</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g. Bilateral EU-China Strategic Partnership (European Commission 2003) • Bilateral EU-Africa Strategic Partnership (Council of the EU 2007) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International organisations, e.g. UN, WTO, OECD, • Other international fora, e.g. G8, G20 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g. 2008 proposal by the EU for a trilateral dialogue with China and Africa (European Commission 2008)

Bilateralism and multilateralism correspond to fundamental analytical concepts of IR theory (Caporaso 1992; Keohane 1990; Ruggie 1992; Ruggie 1993). On the other hand, trilateralism is a more contested analytical tool, which lacks clear analytical grounds in IR scholarship (Alden and Vieira 2005; Gill 1986; Ulman 1976). The aim of this paper, therefore, is to contribute to the formulation of a comprehensive definition of trilateralism, on the basis of which the relations between the EU and strategic partners can be assessed.

3.2.1 *Bilateralism and Multilateralism*

IR literature commonly refers to bilateralism in terms of a nominal definition, whereby the number of parties is used as the primary criterion. According to this definition, bilateral relations involve two parties. The concept thus represents the most basic form of international relations. Most traditional IR contributions refer to bilateralism as international relations between two nation states.

Despite the initial meaning of bilateralism as the international relations between two nation states, bilateralism has also been used to study the EU's foreign policy. Scholars in the field of EFP research commonly agree that the notion of bilateralism can also be applied to the EU's external relations (Gratius 2011; Renard 2012). The concept of bilateralism is used to describe the EU's international relations with third countries, or so-called "regional-state relations" (Hassan 2010). In the recent policy discourse and

academic literature, the EU's bilateral relations with third countries have commonly been labelled as "strategic partnerships" (Gratius 2011, 1). Scholars have, however, highlighted that, unlike what might be implied by the word "partnership", the notion of EU strategic partnerships does not imply any specific level or intensity in the bilateral relations between the EU and the third country (Baroowa 2007, 748). Whereas in the EFP literature the notion of EU strategic partnership primarily refers to the EU's bilateral relations with third countries, EU policymakers have also recently started to use the concept to describe the EU's bilateral relations with other regional organisations. The understanding of bilateral EU strategic partnership has therefore been extended from its initial meaning of "regional-state relations" to describe what IR scholars describe as "interregional" relations.

Taking into account the recent evolution in the EU's policy discourse, this framework defines bilateralism in terms of the institutionalised diplomatic relations between the EU and third countries, as well as between the EU and other regions/regional organisations. This broad definition of bilateralism is justified by the fact that, in the same way that bilateralism is applied to the EU, which is in fact not a member state, it should also be applied to other regional organisations. For the purpose of conceptual clarity, it is important to highlight that when EU policymakers and scholars refer to strategic partnerships, they generally describe the institutionalised bilateral relations with third countries or regional organisations and do not imply any specific level or intensity of interaction (Baroowa 2007, 748). This concept should, therefore, not be confused with the notion of Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships developed in this paper. As outlined in subsection 3.1.1 of this paper, CSP expresses a certain level of intensity of relations between the EU and third countries or regions.

IR scholars commonly define multilateralism as a counterpart to bilateralism (Martin 1992). Unlike bilateralism, the notion of multilateralism only gained prominence after the end of the Cold War to describe the formation of a growing number of international organisations. The IR debate around multilateralism is characterised by both minimalist and maximalist interpretations (Corbetta and Dixon 2004). The minimalist definition goes back to Robert O. Keohane. According to his formal or nominal definition, multilateralism is "the practice of co-ordinating national policies in groups of three or more states" (Keohane 1990, 731). Hence, Keohane differentiates multilateralism from bilateralism mainly through the number of states involved. This perspective contrasts with the substantive or qualitative definition of multilateralism, which considers the quality of the patterns of relations. According to the more demanding definition advocated by John Ruggie, multilateralism is "an institutional form which coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of generalised principles of conduct" (Ruggie 1992, 564). Generalised principles of conduct are conceived as "norms exhorting general if not universal models of relating to other states" (Caporaso 1992, 602). Drawing on Ruggie's definition, James Caporaso defines three properties according to which multilateralism distinguishes itself from other forms of international relations, such as bilateralism. These are indivisibility, generalised principles of conduct, and diffuse reciprocity (Caporaso 1992).

Alongside the conceptualisation of multilateralism by IR scholars, a specific definition of multilateralism emerged in the EFP literature known as effective multilateralism. The notion of effective multilateralism was first put forward in the EU's policy discourse

and, in particular, in the 2003 European Security Strategy (Council of the EU 2003). Considering the fact that the ESS does not provide a precise definition of the notion, an important number of scholarly interpretations of effective EU multilateralism have emerged (Gratius 2011; Koops 2011). A widely used definition was originally put forward by Sven Biscop, who defines effective multilateralism as “the development of a stronger international society, well functioning international institutions and a rule-based international order” (Biscop 2004, 27). Hence, effective multilateralism is based on two key elements: the EU’s efforts to cooperate with other international organisations and the EU’s contribution to international rules and principles. In terms of international organisations, both the UN system and the WTO are considered to be cornerstones in the EU’s vision of effective multilateralism (Gratius 2011, 2). Nevertheless, the EU also actively participates in other international organisations, such as the IMF, the Council of Europe and the OECD. Moreover, it also supports looser international fora, such as the G8 and G20. In regard to the EU’s contribution to international norms, its multilateral efforts to socialise other actors to specific international principles can be observed in a variety of different policy fields or issue areas, such as trade, climate change, security, development and human rights (Bouchard et al. 2013; Gratius 2011, 6).

Drawing on the maximalist IR definition of multilateralism and the specific notion of EU effective multilateralism, this framework defines multilateralism as the interaction between at least two actors (states and regional organisations) in a more or less institutionalised setting and according to certain shared, generalised principles of conduct. This definition relates to the notion of multilateral institutions as international organisations which “seek to establish global consensus around certain ideas they see as important for their policy purpose” (Boas and McNeill 2004, 2).

3.2.2 *Trilateralism or Trilateral Development Cooperation (TDC)*

Trilateralism represents the third of the three configurations of comprehensive strategic relations outlined by the analytical framework. Unlike the other two configurations, the meaning of trilateralism remains largely contested in the academic literature. The subsequent paragraphs will provide a brief overview of how scholars from IR, EFP and development studies have approached the concept of trilateralism.

Trilateralism, however, is not a completely unknown concept in IR scholarship (Chen 2007). Initial research on trilateral relations emerged during the Cold War period. While in the context of a bipolar world most IR studies were oriented towards the study of traditional bilateral relations, some scholars started investigating examples of strategic triads involving three players (Dittmer 1981). Unfortunately, these contributions primarily interpreted trilateralism against the background of the bilateral relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union (Gill 1986). According to this specific perspective of trilateralism, developments in each of the three bilateral dyads inherently had an impact on the other two dyads (Oros 2010).

Overall, IR scholars relied on the notion of trilateralism to describe both situations of competition and forms of cooperation. The relations between the US, the Soviet Union and China were generally described through the perspective of competitive trilateralism (Ross 1993; Segal 1982). Instead, the partnership between the US, European countries

and Japan was given the label of cooperative trilateralism (Ulman 1976). The use of trilateralism to describe cooperative relations between three actors raised questions in regard to the distinction between trilateralism and multilateralism. One argument put forward to distinguish trilateralism from multilateralism was the recognition that trilateralism generally involves fewer actors compared to multilateralism and therefore offers a more efficient form of cooperation. According to the US, a new forum of cooperation was necessary because the broader international conditions hampered multilateral cooperation and did not allow the US, Western Europe and Japan to promote their specific interests as democracies. Whereas trilateralism enjoys only limited consideration by the broader IR literature, it has received even less attention from EFP scholars. With the exceptions of a few studies on EU strategic partnerships (Grevi 2012, 19; Renard 2012), in particular the reference to an “EU, China and US triangle” (Deckers 2012; Shambaugh 2005) the notion of trilateralism is largely absent from the EFP research agenda.

In contrast to the lack of interest in trilateralism shown by IR and EFP scholars, the concept has gained considerable popularity in the development studies literature. Whereas in the past most of the literature related to the study of development focused on bilateral development relations and multilateral channels of aid (Abenur 2007) – against current global power shifts towards multipolarity – a distinctive research strand focusing on triangular, tripartite or trilateral development cooperation has emerged in recent years (Abenur 2007; Altenburg and Weikert 2007; Ashoff 2010; Li 2011; McEwan and Mawdsley 2012; Mehta and Nanda 2005; Rosseel et al. 2009; Xu 2011). This new research agenda is closely linked to a growing body of literature on emerging donors and South-South Cooperation (Chahoud 2008; Chaturvedi 2012; Mawdsley 2012). Yet, despite a few exceptions (Li and Bonschab 2012; Mehta and Nanda 2005), most academic contributions on trilateral development cooperation lack a clear conceptualisation of the concept. The missing theoretical understanding of this original concept is reflected in the absence of a common terminology. Some scholars refer to trilateral cooperation (Altenburg and Weikert 2007; Fejerskov 2013; McEwan and Mawdsley 2012; Mehta and Nanda 2005; Pollet et al. 2011), while others use the notion of tripartite (Bräutigam 2009; Rampa and Bilal 2011) or triangular cooperation (Abenur 2007; Chaturvedi 2012; Fordelone 2010). While a few researchers have argued that these three concepts are fundamentally different (Ree 2011), most scholarly contributions use them as synonyms. Faced with the lack of a commonly agreed definition of trilateralism in general and trilateral development cooperation in particular, the analytical framework presented in this paper introduces the novel concept of Trilateral Development Cooperation. Taking into account the variety of existing terminologies for trilateral, triangular or tripartite development cooperation, the decision was made to follow the EU vocabulary of trilateral development cooperation.

The novel definition of Trilateral Development Cooperation (TDC) formulated in this paper presents a combination of the discipline of IR and development studies. As pointed out by experts, the concept of trilateral development cooperation reflects “a shift from traditional forms of development cooperation towards new formats of international cooperation” (Langendorf 2012, 22). Hence, in this paper, TDC is not only defined as a new approach in development cooperation, but also as an original foreign policy strategy. The subsequent paragraphs will briefly outline how TDC distinguishes itself from more traditional forms of bilateral and multilateral development cooperation.

Traditional bilateral development cooperation involves two actors, namely the donor and the recipient. It is therefore commonly labelled as the North-South Cooperation. Moreover, many forms of so-called South-South Cooperation between developing and/or emerging countries are generally conducted through bilateral channels. Trilateral Development Cooperation differs from these two forms of bilateral development cooperation in that it requires more than two partners (European Commission 2008). Moreover, it also involves a more diverse set of actors and corresponds to what may be termed a “North-South-South partnership”.

Whereas most scholarly attention has been given to the relationship between trilateral and bilateral forms of development cooperation (Berger and Grimm 2010; Pollet et al. 2011; Rosseel et al. 2009, 24), little research has been conducted on the boundaries between trilateral development cooperation and forms of multilateral development (Stahl 2012). In fact, most academic publications do not make any distinction between the two forms of development cooperation (McEwan and Mawdsley 2012; Mehta and Nanda 2005; Nijinkeu 2009; Rampa and Bilal 2011). For instance, Deborah Bräutigam uses the notion of “tripartite cooperation” to describe agriculture projects in Africa which are jointly carried out by China and UN agencies, such as the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) (Bräutigam 2009, 65; Bräutigam and Xiaoyang 2009). According to the original definition of TDC put forward here, this new development instrument involves fewer actors than multilateral initiatives and is centred on more concrete, small-scale, ad hoc projects. Whereas multilateral development cooperation conducted in the framework of international organisations like the UN or the World Bank commonly involves exchanges at the policy level, TDC encompasses practical and concrete cooperation at the project level.

4. The Case of EU-China-Africa Relations

This section will apply the novel analytical framework outlined in the previous two sections to the empirical case study of the EU’s relations with China and Africa. The empirical evidence presented here is based on a Ph.D. thesis examining the growing interaction between the EU, China and Africa (Stahl 2013). It was collected through more than 100 in-depth expert interviews carried out in Europe, China and Africa.

4.1 The EU’s Relations with China and Africa

As a consequence of China’s rise, the EU has started to pay more attention to China’s growing influence in Africa and to adopt a pro-active foreign policy response to the increase of Sino-African relations. As part of its efforts to reach out to China and Africa, EU policymakers have made efforts to adjust its relations with China and Africa in the area of development cooperation (Grimm 2008; Grimm 2014; Grauls and Stahl 2010; Hackenesch 2009) and has established strategic partnerships with both actors. These

strategic partnerships represent new institutionalised dialogues to foster bilateral cooperation between the EU and China/Africa. China was the first from among the emerging countries to be officially labelled as a strategic partner of the EU in 2003 (European Commission 2003).

The EU's preference for a strategic partnership with China can be explained by the fact that, of the emerging countries, China is considered the most influential player (Beckley 2011; Goldstein 2001; Ikenberry 2008; Legro 2007; Shambaugh 2005). European foreign policymakers were thus particularly keen to expand their political and economic cooperation with China. At the same time, Chinese policymakers (Masuda 2000) and academics (Pan 2012; Stumbaum and Wei 2012; Zhang 2010) have also started using the notion of strategic partnership (zhanlue huoban guanxi) to describe their bilateral diplomatic relationships with other powers. Similar to their European counterparts, Chinese foreign policymakers refer to their relationship with the EU as a "comprehensive strategic partnership"² (Chinese Government 2014).

In parallel with engaging in strategic partnerships with emerging countries like China, the EU also expanded its inter-regional relations with other regional organisations. The African region has played a prominent role in this regard. In the context of current shifts in the international playing field, the role of the African continent is changing considerably. While Africa has long been a region primarily under the external influence of foreign powers (Engel and Olsen 2005; Taylor 2010), there are some signs pointing towards the fact that growing global multipolarity is strengthening African agency (Brown and Harman 2013; Dietz et al. 2011; Mohan and Lampert 2013). There are two elements contributing to Africa's transition towards being a more independent and strategic player on the world stage. First, the foundation of the African Union in 2002 as a regional organisation has allowed African countries to begin speaking with a single voice in international negotiations and to start formulating a common foreign policy towards its external partners. It therefore comes as no surprise that, in 2007, EU policymakers decided to establish a strategic partnership with Africa by setting up a structured policy dialogue with the African Union (Council of the EU 2007). Moreover, similar to the European and Chinese policy discourse, African decision-makers have started formulating a foreign policy rhetoric centred on strategic partnerships. For instance, recent policy documents from the African Union frequently used the concept of strategic partnerships to describe the diversification of the AU's international partners (African Union 2012).

On the basis of its bilateral strategic partnerships with China and Africa, the EU put forward the policy initiative of a trilateral EU-China-Africa dialogue. In October 2008, the European Commission issued a communication calling for a trilateral dialogue with China and Africa (European Commission 2008), which was later supported by the Council (Council of the EU 2008). The EU proposed to cooperation with China and Africa in four particular policy areas: peace and security, support for African infrastructure, sustainable management of the environment and natural resources, as well as agriculture and food security.

² This notion should, however, not be confused with the concept of CSP outlined in section 3 of this paper.

Taking into account the analytical framework outlined in sections 2 and 3, it would at first sight appear that the empirical trend of growing EU-China-Africa relations represents a CSP. However, the next subsection will show that Africa and China were reluctant to enter into a trilateral dialogue. The EU was therefore unsuccessful in reaching its foreign policy objective of building a CSP with China and Africa.

4.2 The Missing EU-China-Africa Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

Overall, the trilateral EU, China and Africa dialogue suffered from a lack of support from the EU's partners. By examining in more detail the responses of China and Africa to the EU's trilateral proposal, this section sheds light on the main factors that prevented the EU from building a CSP with China and Africa.

4.2.1 The Role of China and Africa

The African Union and its member states strongly opposed the EU's policy initiative of an EU-China-Africa trilateral dialogue. This rejection has to be seen against the backdrop of growing diplomatic tensions in bilateral EU-Africa relations (Stahl 2013). Despite the promising establishment of a bilateral EU-Africa strategic partnership, the AU has become increasingly dissatisfied with the EU. In particular, the AU has voiced growing criticisms regarding the EU's attempts to impose European standards rather than adapting to African policy priorities. These tensions arose in particular in the area of human rights and democracy, as well as the economic field. In this context, the AU and its member states were suspicious about the real intentions behind the EU's trilateral offer, and most African representatives perceived the EU's trilateral dialogue as European interference into African affairs (Castillejo 2013).

While African policymakers have expressed fierce resistance to the EU's proposal of trilateral development cooperation, China adopted a more ambivalent position (Stahl 2013). Initially, Beijing did not have any particular interest in engaging in a trilateral dialogue with the EU and Africa. Over time, however, Chinese authorities have become more receptive to the idea. Suffering from a negative image internationally and in Africa, Beijing started putting more efforts towards exposing its activities in Africa to the wider international community. In light of these recent efforts, Chinese policymakers identified the trilateral dialogue as an opportunity to show more openness and transparency. At the same, China is concerned with the respect of its traditional foreign principles of non-interference and equal partnership, which implies that it would only engage in a trilateral dialogue this is supported by the African partners (Li 2011; Pollet et al. 2011).

4.2.2 Research findings

In sum, section 4 has demonstrated that EU-China-Africa relations cannot be described in terms of a CSP. Based on the three levels of comprehensive strategic relations defined by the analytical framework, the table below shows that EU-China-Africa relations match only with one of the five criteria of a CSP, namely that of “informal, ad hoc exchanges”. Empirical evidence shows that in several African countries there have been initial instances of informal encounters between European diplomats, Chinese officials and African authorities (Stahl 2013). Yet, due Africa’s and, partly, also China’s resistance, these initial informal relations have not reached a more formal stage or translated into any sort of agreement. Moreover, no trilateral development projects between the EU, China and Africa have thus far seen the light. Hence, the EU-China-Africa case study does not correspond to what has been defined by the analytical framework as CSP. Instead, it qualifies as the lowest level of EU, China and Africa strategic interaction, which is that of coordination.

Table 5: Measurement Scheme for EU-China-Africa Comprehensive Strategic Relations

	<i>Comprehensive Strategic Partnership</i>	<i>Cooperation</i>	<i>Coordination</i>	<i>The Case of EU-China-Africa Relations</i>
Informal, ad hoc exchanges	✓	✓	✓	✓
Formal, regular discussions	✓	✓	✓	✗
Informal consensus	✓	✓	✗	✗
Official agreement	✓	✗	✗	✗
Concrete joint projects		✗	✗	✗

✓ = existent

✗ = missing

5. Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, the main objective of this paper is to provide a new theoretical analysis of EU foreign policy in a multipolar world. Taking the example of the new empirical trend of growing EU-China-Africa interaction in the fields of foreign policy and development cooperation relations, this paper demonstrates that new conceptual categories are needed in order to assess the EU's changing international role. Most importantly, the paper argues that European foreign policy research should move away from its traditional inward-looking focus to putting more emphasis on the interaction between the EU and emerging players. The paper proposes a conceptual framework centred around the notion of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership as a possible way forward towards the formulation of a new European foreign policy research agenda.

In addition to advancing the study of EU foreign policy in general, the paper also makes a specific contribution to the analysis of the EU's relations with China and Africa thereby laying the foundation for a new area of research examining EU-China-Africa relations. Whereas most of the studies on EU-China-Africa relations have been conducted by European scholars, African voices have been rather absent and only a few Chinese academics have started to develop a growing interest in the topic (Ling 2010; Liu 2011; Wu 2011; Xu 2011). Hence, the strengthening of the African and Chinese research expertise is a key precondition for the establishment of a new EU-China-Africa research field.

Finally, by introducing the concept of TDC, the paper strengthens links between IR and development studies and thereby promotes an interdisciplinary research agenda.

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