

The EU-Japan Strategic Partnership in the 21st Century: Motivations, Constraints and Practice

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Abstract

This article examines the strategic partnership between the European Union (EU) and Japan in the post-Cold War era by focusing on the bilateral political and security cooperation. To this end, the discussion explores the motivations of both sides for strengthening ties, the constraints on cooperation and the main joint initiatives. The article demonstrates that, on the basis of shared values and common goals, as well as the two partners' focus on soft power, the Euro-Japanese partnership has since the early 1990s become more action-oriented and has acquired a certain strategic dimension. Nevertheless, different foreign policy priorities and structural limitations concerning the role Japan and the EU each can assume as international political and security actors suggest that the bilateral partnership is not likely to move far beyond its current 'paper value', and hence become a more intense and genuinely strategic one, in the years to come.

Keywords

EU; Japan; Politics; Security; Post-Cold War

EUROPE AND JAPAN HAVE ENTERED THE 21ST CENTURY WITH THE NEW PRIORITY OF raising their bilateral relations to the level of a strategic partnership.¹ While during the Cold War period interactions between the two were largely limited to the economic area, Euro-Japanese relations after 1989 have gradually come to encompass joint political and security objectives. One reason for this expansion has been the deepening economic interdependence between the European Union (EU) and Japan. In 2009, Japan was the EU's seventh largest export market (after the United States (US), Switzerland, China, Russia, Turkey and Norway) and its sixth largest source of imports (after China, the US, Russia, Switzerland and Norway). Trade with Japan accounted for 4 per cent of EU trade, with the share of the US and China being the largest one, *i.e.* 16 and 13 per cent respectively. The EU, for its part, occupied in 2009 a third place in Japan's imports and exports after China and the US. Its share of Japanese trade was 12 per cent, which was close to the US share of 14 per cent and less than China's share of 21 per cent (see European Commission 2009). The mutual recognition of each partner's growing significance in the international arena in the post-Cold War era has been equally important for the strengthening of bilateral

¹ In this article, Europe refers to the European Community/European Union as a regional entity. Accordingly, the discussion does not examine the bilateral relations between the individual EU Member States and Japan, which have not been replaced by the Japan-EU partnership.

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relations. This is due to EU integration and Japan's increased regional and global role, as well as the promotion by Brussels and Tokyo of similar, non-traditional, approaches to solving today's security challenges.

Since the early 2000s, the EU and Japan have been referring to one another as "natural strategic partners" (e.g. European Commission 1999; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 2003; Ferrero-Waldner 2006). This has reflected their shared values, including the promotion of democracy, and a willingness to develop a more comprehensive agenda for joint actions based on their mutual perceptions of being 'civilian powers'. The term means that the two actors emphasise international cooperation and the utilisation of non-military, mainly economic, instruments for achieving foreign policy goals (Maull 1990). In their pursuit of a strategic partnership, Europe and Japan have undertaken a number of initiatives that fall primarily in the realm of 'soft', or non-traditional, security. This concept refers to the broad area of security beyond the 'hard', or military, dimension and encompasses political, economic, societal and environmental aspects (see, for example, Buzan 1991). In the context of Euro-Japanese cooperation, it emphasises a focus on climate change, development, conflict prevention and peace building.

This article examines the development of a strategic dimension in Euro-Japanese relations, by looking at the partners' motivations, constraints on their political and security cooperation, and joint initiatives. The following discussion first explores the bilateral interactions during the Cold War before analysing the respective reasons for the EU and Japan to seek a strategic partnership after 1989 and the constraints they face. The article then examines key bilateral documents and the main Euro-Japanese achievements, which are regarded by the two partners as representing their strategic cooperation. The article concludes by arguing that despite the solid and comprehensive bilateral relations, shared objectives and joint initiatives for realising common goals that point to a strategic dimension in the relations, the EU-Japan partnership is still more of a 'paper' partnership and hence not as intensive as may have been presented at the official level.

Historical constraints: the US factor and mutual ignorance

After the end of the Second World War both Western Europe (the European Community, or the EC, from the 1960s) and Japan were completely devastated, and hence faced an urgent need for economic and societal rehabilitation. For the Europeans, their main security priorities in the wake of the fall of the Iron Curtain became the integration of the new West German state and the tackling of the Soviet threat. With the onset of the Korean War in 1950 and the spread of communism in East Asia ensuring external security protection emerged also as a priority for Japan once the US-led occupation period (1945-1952) ended. America played a major role in the post-war reconstruction of both Japan and the countries of Western Europe, and, equally important, in addressing their respective security concerns. For Japan, it was the 'Yoshida doctrine', named after the post-war Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida, and the signing in 1951 of the original Japan-US Security Treaty that tied the country to America. The Yoshida doctrine meant an alignment and close cooperation with Washington with regard to Japan's economic recovery and national rebuilding, and the pursuit of minimal military rearmament. The realisation of Tokyo's goal of post-war reconstruction was facilitated by the asymmetrical arrangements put in place by the 1960 Revised Security Treaty. While the US would provide for Japan's defence, Japan would only provide bases and host-nation support to the American military forces for the purposes of maintaining stability in the Far East. This particular alliance arrangement reflected Tokyo's security limitations under Article 9 of Japan's post-War Constitution of 1947. Known also as the 'peace clause', Article 9 renounced the use of military force as a legitimate instrument of statecraft and committed Japan to non-possession of war potential. The official interpretation of Article 9, which has remained in

force since the post-war period, is that Japan is permitted to maintain only the minimum level of armed forces necessary for self-defence. It is prohibited from exercising its right to collective self-defence and hence can not reciprocate by defending an ally (*i.e.* the US) in case of an attack. Relying on the US security umbrella, Tokyo could focus throughout the Cold War era on the country's economic development and expansion, while limiting its international role. This, in turn, laid the basis for the US-centred foreign and security policy of Japan, which was pursued by successive Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) administrations well into the 21st century.

In Western Europe, the devastating humanitarian and economic situation in the post-war years, as well as the threat of Soviet expansion, meant an urgent need for various forms of aid. In this context, the Truman doctrine of 1947 and, more importantly, the announcement of the Marshall Plan the same year demonstrated the US commitment to help Europeans resist the communist threat by providing assistance for the socio-economic and political revival of the West. With the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) under the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty, it became clear that Europe's main security concern, *i.e.* the Soviet threat, would be addressed within the framework of the (US-centred) transatlantic alliance. In this way, by formalising its commitment to the defence of Western Europe (similarly to its commitment to Japan), America cemented its leading position in the European foreign policy orientation during the Cold War period.

The military weakness of both Japan and Europe, projected against the US military strength, defined the crucial role the Pacific and Atlantic Alliances played in Japanese and European security, respectively. By contrast, the lack of a military-security linkage between Europe and Japan arguably hindered the development of bilateral relations during the Cold War, while their respective reliance on Washington for security protection prevented both actors from pursuing an independent foreign policy.

The Cold War era saw a rather distant political relationship between Japan and the EC, characterised mainly by mutual indifference to the problems of the other (Satoh 1982; Iwanaga 2000), as well as lacking shared regional or global goals. In the economic area, trade disputes dominated bilateral relations throughout the 1970s and were hardly a good starting point for a deepened economic partnership. Moreover, the importance each side accorded to their respective alliances with the US meant that all the way till the end of the Cold War the EC and Japan continued largely to ignore one another. This resulted in the absence of an institutionalised Euro-Japanese framework for regular consultations and cooperation on international issues. To be sure, the strengthening of Europe's and Japan's respective international positions in the later stages of the Cold War encouraged the two actors to broaden their cooperation (Gilson 2000). The establishment of European Political Cooperation (EPC) in 1970 and the growing economic role of the Community following the launch in 1987 of the Single Market Programme prompted Tokyo policy-makers' increased awareness of Europe as an international actor. Europe, for its part, increasingly came to recognise Japan's strengthened international presence from the 1970s on (in addition to the country's economic significance), seen in Tokyo's more active involvement in several global fora and institutions, including G7 and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (Gilson 2000).

Finally, as the Cold War resumed in the early 1980s, the understanding that international security had to be regarded as a matter of common concern for Western industrialised nations increasingly gained ground on both sides. Peace and security in East Asia came to be seen as related to peace and security in Europe, and vice-versa. It was against this background that Yasuhiro Nakasone, the then Japanese Prime Minister (1982-1987), declared at the 1983 Williamsburg Summit that "Western security is indivisible and must be approached on a global basis" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 1984). While high-level bilateral consultations subsequently increased, political cooperation between Japan and

the EC remained underdeveloped and conducted on an *ad hoc* basis until the late 1980s. In contrast, it was the economic interaction between the two that continued to almost exclusively define the nature of their relations.

Motivations for a post-Cold War strategic partnership: common values and approaches to security²

The EU's approach towards Asia and Japan

In 1994, the European Commission produced its first Asia strategy paper under the title *Towards a New Asia Strategy*. The document stresses the need for Europe (the EU from 1993) to “strengthen its economic presence” in, and “develop a political dialogue” with, Asia, “make a positive contribution to regional security” and economic development, as well as promote the consolidation of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights in the region (European Commission 1994: 1-3). The last three objectives are, of course, core ones from the perspective of the EU’s foreign policy and, as will be discussed later in this article, are shared by Japan. What is new is Europe’s interest in moving beyond the economic dimension to include political and security interactions with that part of the world. The recognition of the emergence of “new Asian powers” (among others, Japan) and the increasing “political weight” of the region is linked to Europe’s ability to maintain “its major role on the world stage” (European Commission 1994: 7). This suggests that the EU’s rising interest in Asia, and Japan, has been largely based on the economic and political importance of Asia in the post-Cold War period, as well as the impact that it has had on Europe’s own international aspirations.

The above motivations are clearly seen in Europe’s assessment of Japan’s changing foreign policy. The 1994 document underlines that the Union should develop a political dialogue with those countries that “are prepared and able to make a significant contribution” to Asian peace and stability (European Commission 1994: 10). In this context, Tokyo is mentioned in the first place among the Asian partners with which Brussels has a bilateral political dialogue. For its part, the Commission’s 1995 paper *Europe and Japan: The Next Steps* strongly argues for a further strengthening of bilateral political relations in light of Japan’s “greater readiness to take on international commitments” (European Commission 1995: 8). Both documents emphasise the EU’s appreciation of Japan’s major contribution to the economic development and stability of East Asia through trade, Official Development Assistance (ODA), investment and participation in confidence-building measures – indeed, all being ‘soft power’ tools. It is without any doubt that, already in the early 1990s, Tokyo was regarded as being *qualified* enough to become Brussels’ strategic partner in Asia.

The progress in European integration from the early 1990s on and, related to it, the EU’s willingness and ability to assume a larger global role have also stimulated Brussels to seek a deeper engagement with East Asia and Japan. Europe’s political ambitions were clear with the establishment of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as a separate intergovernmental pillar in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. In 1997, the Amsterdam Treaty created the post of High Representative for the CFSP with a view to increasing the visibility of the Union’s external ‘face’. Finally, the development of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) since 1999 has strengthened the credibility of the Union as an international actor. The ESDP brought a qualitative change to CFSP by making it a more

² It is important to stress that, as the EU is a non-unitary and non-sovereign international actor, its decision-making process towards Japan involves different actors, such as the European Commission and the Member States, with different competences and interests. However, this article does not examine the foreign policy-making process itself, but focuses on the EU’s policies *vis-à-vis* Japan and hence the bilateral agreements/joint initiatives after they have been launched.

'action-oriented' policy centred on proactive crisis management and less a 'declaratory' one with an emphasis on diplomacy (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008).

Given the above developments, it may not come as a surprise that the Commission's 2001 Asia paper, *Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships*, brings a whole new dimension into the Union's relations with the region, notably a security one. Indeed, the emphasis is placed on raising Europe's presence in Asia to "a level commensurate with the growing global weight of an enlarged EU" (European Commission 2001: 3). The security dimension is clear from Europe's intention to "build global partnerships and alliances with Asian countries" (European Commission 2001: 3). This statement may, furthermore, be seen as paving the way for the approach taken in the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS), which mentions Japan (along with China and India) as one of the EU's strategic partners in the framework of the Union's expanded international cooperation (European Council 2003). Finally, the Council's *Guidelines on the EU's Foreign and Security Policy in East Asia* of 2005 show the growing importance of the region for European interests by making specific recommendations for the EU's contribution to East Asian stability.

It is important to note that, with regard to Japan, the strategic aspect of the Euro-Japanese relations was already underlined in 1999, in the Commission's *Working Document on Japan*. The paper attributes the evolution of the bilateral partnership beyond the trade area largely to Japan's deepened engagement in world affairs through "economic and political instruments" and, in this context, with the EU (European Commission 1999: 1, 5). The emphasis placed on Japan's soft power is obvious. The document also stresses the growing mutual interest in each other's region and shared goals of stability. The Commission's 2001 *Europe and Asia* paper echoes the above observations.

The above analysis shows that, since the 1990s, Japan has occupied an important place in the EU's evolving Asia policy. The bilateral strategic dialogue with Japan has closely mirrored the issues that Europe has addressed within the context of its broader engagement with Asia, for example, with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) or within Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM).³ Indeed, the Euro-Japanese partnership may be regarded as reflecting, but also arguably giving much impetus to, the Union's new priority of a deeper engagement in that region. Based on the shared values of freedom, democracy and the rule of law, Brussels regards Tokyo "unquestionably" as its "closest partner" in the region (Solana 2006). The EU has therefore emphasised that the two partners are "like-minded in many ways" (Council of the European Union 2005) and has stressed that Japan's democratic political system makes it a "natural strategic partner" to Europe (Ferrero-Waldner 2006). Not surprisingly from the perspective of the EU's foreign policy, the common values have been mentioned in virtually all speeches and statements made by European officials. The shared values have also been linked to the mutual perception of Europe and Japan as civilian powers (Van Rompuy 2010). In considering its relations with Japan, Europe's conceptualisation of security in the ESS is particularly important. Indeed, the EU's approach stresses the comprehensive nature of security threats (*i.e.* beyond the military dimension) and the variety of means (*e.g.* political, economic, civilian) needed to tackle them (European Council 2003). As will be discussed below, Japan has adopted a similar approach to security. In addition, its non-military security role both in East Asia and internationally has created opportunities for Brussels to jointly promote alternative security paths.

³ See, for example, Anderson and Wiessala 2007; Balme and Bridges 2008; Gaens 2008.

Japan's approach towards the EU

In the *1991 Diplomatic Bluebook*, Tokyo called explicitly for strengthening Euro-Japanese relations, which were seen as “relatively weak” in comparison with the US-EC and Japan-US partnerships (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 1991). Tokyo stressed that the shared political values, common security interests and both actors’ growing international responsibilities were a basis for the transformation of the relationship with Brussels from an economic one to one being more comprehensive in nature. This Japanese perception clearly mirrored Europe’s approach towards Japan discussed earlier. Throughout the 1990s, Tokyo also emphasised Brussels’ “greater weight in the world at large” due to European integration, as well as the need for a mutual regional engagement (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 1996). The ‘indivisibility’ of security, *i.e.* the fact that events in one region could affect other parts of the world, was clearly seen by Tokyo as an important factor for a strengthened partnership with Brussels.

In the *2001 Diplomatic Bluebook*, Japan’s partnership with Europe was discussed within the section of “main bilateral relations” (after those with the US, South Korea, China and Russia). This contrasted with earlier references to Europe in the section on “regional developments” and was an illustration of the increasing significance of the EU in Tokyo’s foreign policy. The upgraded treatment of the Union was made clear in 2003 when Japan underscored its intention to “build a strategic partnership” with the EU, which would take place in the context of “widening the scope” of Japanese diplomacy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 2003: 76). In other words, as Japan was seeking to expand its international contributions, the EU came to be perceived as a strong partner for Tokyo to realise a number of foreign policy goals. Japan also continued to stress that its interaction with Europe, in comparison to that with the US and Asian countries, continued to be “relatively sparse” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 2003: 79). As seen in successive *Diplomatic Bluebook* issues in the second half of the 2000s, Japan’s approach towards the EU as a strategic partner has emphasised the similarities between the two actors, including their being major advanced democracies sharing common values, and their role and responsibility in fostering international stability and prosperity (see Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 2007, 2008, 2009). It should be stressed that Tokyo’s motivations for deepening its relations with Brussels after 1989 have been initially based on the economic opportunities emerging from the eastward enlargement of the Union and the EU’s increasing economic power. On the other hand, Europe’s rise as an international political and security actor that has prioritised soft power tools has opened up a new venue for Tokyo to profile itself as a civilian power by strengthening its relations with Brussels. In other words, Japan saw this partnership as a way to promote the country’s own diplomatic posture and thereby to somewhat distance itself from the traditional US bilateralism in its foreign policy.

Common approaches to security have emerged as a particularly important factor driving Japan’s strategic partnership with Europe. Since the post-war years, Tokyo has embraced a comprehensive conceptualisation of security beyond the traditional military dimension, which stresses economic, social, political and environmental foreign policy objectives. As discussed earlier, the ESS advocates a similar approach to security. Japan’s regional and global security strategy has significantly relied on soft power, which is reflected, for example, in Japan’s ODA policies, promotion of human security and involvement in post-conflict reconstruction initiatives. This strategy is in line with the country’s comprehensive conceptualisation of security (Atanassova-Cornelis 2010). To be sure, Tokyo’s pursuit of hard power has not been altogether substituted by the other security goals, but it has remained mostly confined to the bilateral alliance with the US (to be discussed below). In this context, former Japanese Defence Minister Yasukazu Hamada stressed in 2009 that, while the alliance with America remained the cornerstone of Japanese foreign policy,

“various new perspectives can be gained by deepening ties with the European countries” (Nakayama 2009). These “new perspectives” are arguably non-traditional approaches to security, which, for Japan, remain a crucial component of its security policy.

Constraints over an EU-Japan strategic partnership

Different foreign policy priorities, as well as structural limitations concerning the role Japan and the EU each are able to assume in the international security arena, have constrained the development of bilateral relations. Evidently, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, both Brussels and Tokyo acquired somewhat more ‘freedom’ in formulating their respective foreign and security policies independently from Washington. Nevertheless, the US significance in the military security area has not diminished for either of them, and has arguably increased for Japan.

Under the ESDP framework the EU has succeeded within a rather short period of time to develop both military and civilian crisis management capabilities. The launch in 2003 of its first military operation, namely in the Balkans (taking over from a NATO force), and its first ever autonomous operation in the Congo made what was unthinkable in the 1990s a reality. This led to worries in Washington as to the future relevance of NATO (and the US security umbrella) for European security. Although Europe has sought to reduce its dependence on American hard power through CFSP and ESDP, the Union’s military power projection capabilities outside NATO have remained limited (Hughes 2007), while its missions have focused on Europe’s immediate neighbourhood. Furthermore, the so-called ‘Berlin Plus’ arrangements of 2002, which established a working relationship between the EU and NATO in crisis management, meant that Washington could “gain control over ESDP” (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008: 176) and hence influence any potential move towards more autonomous European military capabilities. Finally, while the post-Cold War relevance of NATO has been questioned, the enlargement of the organisation since the 1990s and the division between the EU Member States (both old and new ones) concerning the scope of ESDP suggest that such autonomy is highly unlikely in the foreseeable future.

For Japan, on the other hand, America’s security umbrella has become even more indispensable in the post-Cold War era due to the changing geopolitical environment in East Asia. Indeed, in response to the uncertainties concerning China’s long-term strategic goals in the region, as well as worries about North Korea’s progress in the development of nuclear weapons, Tokyo has increasingly focused on strengthening its military capabilities together with its alliance with Washington. Referred to as Japan’s security ‘normalisation’, this process was especially pronounced during the term of conservative LDP Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (2001-2006). Japan under Koizumi began participating in logistical, humanitarian and reconstruction missions in support of the US ‘war on terror’, engaged in a debate on the revision of Article 9 and acquired Ballistic Missile Defence systems from the US. To be sure, successive prime ministers⁴, especially since the centrist Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) assumed power in 2009, have tended to broaden Japanese diplomacy by emphasising, for example, Tokyo’s ties with Beijing and Seoul. Nevertheless, Japan’s dependence on US hard power, Article 9 limitations and the broad consensus within Japan that an autonomous defence is not an option mean that the bilateral alliance with Washington will continue to be a priority for Tokyo in the area of military security.

⁴ LDP Prime Ministers: Shinzo Abe (2006-2007), Yasuo Fukuda (2007-2008), Taro Aso (2008-2009). DPJ Prime Ministers: Yukio Hatoyama (2009-2010), Naoto Kan (2010-present).

In contrast, Japan does not regard the EU as a major player in solving hard security issues in East Asia, especially concerning North Korea's nuclear developments (but also Taiwan-China relations), which are foremost national security concerns for Tokyo (Berkofsky 2008). This is not to say that Japan's relations with Europe do not touch upon Tokyo's core foreign policy interests (Reiterer 2006). Indeed, the debate in 2004-2005 about the possible lifting of the EU's arms embargo on China was a clear illustration of how European policies may directly affect (in this case negatively) Japanese strategic interests in the region. Tokyo (and Washington for that matter) strongly objected to such a move by Brussels, due to concerns about the negative impact of the lifting of the embargo on Beijing's military modernisation efforts, as well as on the geopolitical situation in East Asia as a whole. In this context, Europe's perceived lack of understanding of the implications of its decision for East Asian security and, related to it, the EU's overall approach towards the PRC based primarily on economic opportunities, have revealed a major perception gap concerning regional security and Euro-Japanese divergence on China (Hughes 2007, Tsuruoka 2008). This difference in foreign policy priorities has, furthermore, contributed to Japan's view of its partnership with Europe as being of less strategic importance than its alliance with the US.

For the EU, on the other hand, East Asia is not a main geographical area of its foreign policy, which may partly be explained by its own post-Cold War strategic priorities and, of course, the challenges of enlargement (see Edwards 2005). In comparison with the EU's policy towards, for example, the Balkans, the Commonwealth of Independent States or Africa, where Europe has tackled conflicts, and sought to shape the political and socio-economic structures of countries, the Union's Asia policy has mainly focused on trade relations and the promotion of inter-regionalism (*e.g.* within ASEM) (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008). The EU's limited hard power capabilities have meant that Brussels is not able to play a role in managing the two 'hot-spots' in East Asia, *i.e.* the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait – a role assumed by the US. The EU is also not a participant in the Six-Party Talks dealing with North Korea's de-nuclearisation and lacks a clearly defined position on the Taiwan issue, which is liable to criticism given its increased rhetoric of seeking an expanded international role (Berkofsky 2006). Although Europe's comprehensive approach to security is welcomed in Asia and Japan, its inability to play a role in pressing hard security issues undermines its strategic value for Tokyo. For the EU, on the other hand, the ever growing importance of its trade relations with China have meant that a lot of European resources in recent years have been dedicated to the development of its relationship with Beijing, which, in turn, has tended to reduce the importance of Tokyo and arguably Asia for Brussels.

Additional structural limitations on the part of the EU and Japan place constraints on what the two partners can expect from one another and achieve together. Europe's inability to 'speak with one voice', for example, during the Iraq War and with regard to the lifting of the arms embargo on China, has often dampened Tokyo's expectations of forging meaningful international initiatives with the Union and strengthened its preference for dealing bilaterally with individual Member States (Reiterer 2006; Tsuruoka 2008). The creation of the permanent post of European Council President following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 gives greater hope for intensified EU-Japan consultations at the highest level, as Herman Van Rompuy is now the external face of the EU on CFSP issues. Nevertheless, a number of challenges remain, for example, concerning Europe's ability to forge common positions in the areas of environment and energy security.⁵ Concerning Japan, Tokyo's traditional reliance in foreign and security policy on Washington, and its unprecedented focus in the 2000s (notably under Koizumi) on deepening its security ties with the US have naturally undermined the value of Japan as an

⁵ The EU does not have a common energy policy, although this is likely to change as the Lisbon Treaty has introduced a legal basis for the EU energy policy.

(independent) international partner for the EU. From a European perspective, the post-Koizumi era has not brought much change as the emphasis in Japanese diplomacy, especially under DPJ-led administrations, has been on strengthening relations with East Asia. Finally, the uncertain domestic political situation in Japan in recent years seen in the annual change of premiership has additionally created difficulties for Brussels in coordinating its relations with Tokyo.

Key bilateral documents

The 1991 Hague Declaration

In July 1991, Tokyo and Brussels signed in The Hague a *Joint Declaration on Relations between the European Community and its Members States and Japan*. The Preamble refers to some of the motivations for a future strategic partnership, namely, the mutual perceptions between Japan and the EC as being “like-minded” in terms of shared values, their growing awareness of one another’s increasing role in the international arena and the need for joint contributions “towards safeguarding peace in the world” (Joint Declaration 1991, The Preamble). The comprehensive nature of the envisaged partnership, *i.e.* beyond the hitherto dominating economic area to include “political, scientific, cultural or other” common interests, and a move towards more concrete joint actions are stressed in Part Two of the Declaration. Finally, in Part Three, the document lists twelve specific areas of cooperation, which fall within the scope of the following three broad categories: coordination on political issues, focus on the field of development and tackling the challenges of globalisation (Owada 2001). It is important to stress that these categories underpin the evolution of a Euro-Japanese partnership primarily in non-traditional security areas. To be sure, hard security issues, such as the non-proliferation of missile technology, are not excluded either, although they arguably do not form the core of the partnership.

In the political field, the document explicitly stresses the need for increased mutual involvement in one another’s region, which, as mentioned earlier, has been an important impetus for Brussels and Tokyo to seek a strengthening of their relations. In Europe, the joint support for the political and economic reforms in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe is indicated as a priority, while in the Asia-Pacific the emphasis is placed on the promotion of peace, stability and prosperity of the region. In line with Europe’s and Japan’s projection of a civilian power image is the area of development – the second broad category for bilateral cooperation stressed in the Hague Declaration. In this regard, support for the poorest countries in the world in their pursuit of sustained development is seen as a major bilateral objective. The final broad category encompasses the challenges of globalisation. These include a variety of “trans-national” issues ranging from environment to terrorism, as well as Euro-Japanese cooperation in the field of science and technology (Joint Declaration 1991, Part Three). Indeed, it is clear that the document envisages a bilateral partnership centred on non-traditional issues and truly global in nature.

The significance of the Joint Declaration is that, first, it institutionalised the political dialogue between Japan and Europe, second, formally recognised the comprehensive nature of their relations, and, third, set specific joint objectives for policy coordination. Equally important, the document created a new framework for regular consultations at the highest level in order to strengthen Euro-Japanese cooperation. These include annual summits between, on the one hand, the President of the European Council (Van Rompuy since 2009) and the President of the Commission and, on the other, the Japanese Prime Minister.

The 2001 Joint Action Plan

Referring to shared values, common security challenges and common global responsibilities, then Japanese Foreign Minister Yohei Kono in his 2000 European tour called for a *Millennium Partnership* between Tokyo and Brussels (Kono 2000). Kono proposed that the first decade of the 21st century be named *The Decade of Japan-Europe Cooperation*. It was subsequently launched at the 2001 EU-Japan summit and arguably sought to upgrade the political relations to a higher level of strategic partnership. At the same summit, the two partners adopted an Action Plan for bilateral cooperation, titled *Shaping Our Common Future*.

An important impetus for the Action Plan was the recognition by both Tokyo and Brussels that the politico-strategic dimension of their relations was still not matching the economic one, hence there remained more potential for cooperation than what had been realised since the 1991 Hague Declaration. Romano Prodi, then President of the European Commission, alluded to this point in 2000 by stressing that an enhanced global partnership between the EU and Japan would involve “working together not only to liberalise world trade”, but also “to promote peace and democracy, as well as sustainable development and to protect the global environment” (Prodi 2000). The same observation concerning the underdeveloped relations is also mentioned in the Commission’s 2001 *Europe and Asia* paper and Japanese *Diplomatic Bluebooks*, discussed earlier. From this perspective, the Action Plan was a means to fill in the gap by seeking to provide a framework for coordination of policies in various areas beyond (but not excluding) the economic one. Indeed, the document acknowledges the “untapped potential” for a more extensive mutual engagement and the need for a “greater focus on concrete measures and concerted action” (EU-Japan Summit 2001: 1).

Similarly to the Hague Declaration, the Action Plan refers to the motivations for an enhanced EU-Japan partnership, which include a “significant convergence of views and policies” between Brussels and Tokyo and a common responsibility as “the world’s largest donors” of ODA (*i.e.* in their capacity of being civilian powers) to promote sustainable development and the reduction of poverty (EU-Japan Summit: 1-2). Of particular importance for the definition of EU-Japan cooperation is the explicit mention in the Action Plan of a shared non-traditional conceptualisation of security. This, as discussed earlier, has been a point of convergence between the two partners. Specifically, the bilateral cooperation will seek to promote “human security for the benefit of all” (EU-Japan Summit: 1-2).

The Action Plan defines the following four major objectives for a wide-ranging cooperation: promotion of peace and security, strengthening economic and trade relations, coping with global and societal challenges, and bringing together people and cultures. The first, as well as the third, objectives are particularly important for the further development of an EU-Japan strategic partnership. In this regard, the document indicates several priority areas, including disarmament and non-proliferation, promotion of human rights, conflict prevention and peace-building, as well as brings a number of non-traditional challenges to the bilateral agenda.

The above discussion illustrates that the partnership between the EU and Japan has primarily focused on soft power cooperation. This has presented both Tokyo and Brussels with opportunities to promote their respective civilian power profiles, and thereby develop alternative approaches to security “in which the links with the US will remain strong, but not omnipresent” (European Commission 1995: 3).

The EU-Japan strategic partnership in practice

The EU-Japan summit agenda

In the process of putting the Action Plan into practice, the annual EU-Japan Summit “is used to drive implementation” (Hatwell 2007: 23), for it plays an important role in both the evaluation of results of cooperation and the indication of new priority initiatives to be pursued by the following summit. In-between summits, the Action Plan Steering Group meets twice a year to monitor the progress of implementation of the designated objectives, as well as to identify new potential areas for cooperation between Tokyo and Brussels (Hatwell 2007: 23-24).

The specific summit priorities in the political and security dimensions of EU-Japan relations reflect the international situation, hence the most salient issues at that moment. For example, at the 2002 Summit, one year after the adoption of the Action Plan and the 11th of September terrorist attacks on the US, the Joint Press Statement expressed the commitment of both sides to deepen their “strategic partnership collaboration in areas of priority international concern”, with counter-terrorism issues dominating the agenda (EU-Japan Summit 2002). The 2004 Summit, for its part, emphasised the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan, while reaffirming the importance of “forging a solid strategic partnership” against the background of the EU’s enlargement and Japan’s expansion of its international role (notably in the Afghan and Iraqi campaigns) (EU-Japan Summit 2004). The 2005 Summit was largely dominated by the possible lifting of the EU’s arms embargo on China. The significance of that issue was clear from the front place given to it in the 2005 EU-Japan Joint Press Statement, while Tokyo’s objection to the lifting of the embargo was also explicitly underscored in the 2006 and 2007 documents. Since 2007, the emphasis at the summits has been placed on climate change, energy security, development and human security (especially in Africa), as well as on nuclear non-proliferation, notably the Iranian and North Korean nuclear issues.

An important (although not sought) outcome of the arms embargo question for EU-Japan relations was the establishment in October 2005 of the bilateral “Strategic Dialogue on East Asia’s Security Environment”. Against the background of the EU’s limited security involvement in the region, some scholars have argued that it was unlikely that Tokyo would have sought such a dialogue with Brussels had it not been for the issue of the lifting of the arms embargo on the EU-China agenda (see Berkofsky 2008). The initial motivations notwithstanding, the new strategic dialogue will likely further the EU’s relations with Japan and, by extension, Europe’s engagement in Asia.

Given the expiration of the Action Plan in 2011 and the mutual recognition that “there is much more to be done” concerning the relationship, Japan and the EU at the latest 2010 Summit stressed their willingness to move towards a “more action-oriented” cooperation in the future (EU-Japan Summit 2010). To this end, the Joint Press Statement lists several specific areas for bilateral cooperation, including capacity building in Afghanistan, counter-piracy off the coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden, and Japan’s contribution of non-military personnel to civilian missions within the ESDP framework. The latter was proposed by the Japanese side, and showed Tokyo’s appreciation of civilian crisis management and post-conflict peace-building activities carried out under the ESDP. It could be argued, therefore, that the latest summit has opened up a new door for EU-Japan cooperation, *i.e.* to make it more focused on specific, short-term goals rather than on general, long-term objectives.⁶ The Joint Press Statements, for their part, have become crucial documents for assessing, first, the areas of convergence/divergence between Japan

⁶ This was also one of the conclusions of the symposium on the Future of EU-Japan Relations held at the European Commission in Brussels in February 2010, to which this author was invited.

and the EU, second, the priority actions in the bilateral cooperation on the basis of the Action Plan, and, third, the progress of delivery on the set objectives.

Main EU-Japan initiatives⁷

Projecting a civilian power image and motivated by the desire to increase their international contributions primarily by relying on soft power, Europe and Japan have developed their cooperation since the 1991 Hague Declaration largely in the area of soft security. Given the different foreign policy priorities and structural limitations discussed earlier, it is perhaps not surprising that common values and a shared civilian power discourse have indeed formed the basis of this partnership. As the preceding sections have illustrated, the nature of their security relations reflects a Euro-Japanese convergence on what constitutes the most pressing global issues and means to address them, *i.e.* non-traditional ones. The two partners have focused, in particular, on climate change and energy, foreign aid, economic development, human security, and conflict prevention and peace building – areas which fall within the third and first objectives of the Action Plan (global and societal challenges, and promotion of peace and security, respectively).

As the Joint Press Statements in recent years indicate, climate change, notably the need for a reduction of greenhouse emissions, has emerged as a priority issue on the EU-Japan agenda and has reflected their shared belief that it is “one of the most serious environmental challenges facing the planet” (EU-Japan Summit 2004). For example, Brussels and Tokyo are working together towards the establishment of a comprehensive post-2012 framework under the UN that would include all major economies. They are also closely cooperating in the development of innovative technologies for more effective emission reduction. Related to the objective of climate change mitigation have been the issues of energy security and efficiency. Given Japan’s and the EU’s dependence on secure access to energy supplies for ensuring economic growth, as well as for maintaining their reliance on economic power in foreign policy, energy has increasingly gained salience in the framework of EU-Japan cooperation. In 2007, the two partners established a high-level expert dialogue on energy, which reflected Japan’s leading global role in energy technologies and the EU’s increased focus on this field following the European Council’s adoption of an Energy and Climate Policy (Hatwell 2007). In this context, Brussels and Tokyo organised in 2009 a joint strategic workshop on energy research and technological development, which became a mouthpiece of their shared objective of spreading renewable energy sources through multilateral cooperation.

The area of development has been a natural area of convergence between Brussels and Tokyo due to their emphasis on soft power tools in their respective foreign policies, namely through the provision of ODA. The EU is the world’s largest ODA and humanitarian aid donor, and while its foreign aid has historically prioritised the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP), it is now spread more evenly across various regions (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008). The objectives of Europe’s development policy include poverty reduction and sustainable economic development, which are inherently linked to the Union’s main foreign policy goals of promoting democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008). For Japan, given its imperialistic past, the utilisation of ODA as a main diplomatic instrument has been an expression of the country’s peaceful foreign policy approach since the post-war years (Atanassova-Cornelis 2010). Provision of aid gradually emerged from the 1960s on as a major tool for pursuing comprehensive security in Japan’s foreign policy (Yamakage 1997), especially towards

⁷ This section is by no means exhaustive. It only provides several examples of joint initiatives in the framework of the EU-Japan strategic cooperation in order to demonstrate the soft power focus in the relationship. A deeper and more comprehensive analysis of bilateral activities goes beyond the scope of this article.

Asian countries. Tokyo became a primary ODA donor, in particular, to Southeast Asian states and China, and was the driving force of the economic development and modernisation of East Asia during the Cold War. However, after being the world's top donor for ten consecutive years (1990-2000), Japan has, since 2000, gradually decreased its ODA due to financial constraints. Japan and the EU have cooperated in the field of ODA based on their commitment to mutual regional involvement. Tokyo has made significant provisions of foreign aid, for example, for the post-war reconstruction and stabilisation of the Western Balkans, while Brussels, for its part, has extended humanitarian and development assistance to a number of East Asian countries, including Cambodia, Thailand and North Korea. Recent initiatives include Euro-Japanese cooperation in the preparation of the fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV) in 2008 and the establishment in 2010 of an annual development policy dialogue. The dialogue seeks to achieve better bilateral coordination on aid and development effectiveness, and places a special emphasis on regional development issues in Africa, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Myanmar.

Closely related to development cooperation has been the increased joint focus of Tokyo and Brussels on human security, which reflects the importance each of them accords to human security in their respective foreign policies. In its pursuit of non-traditional approaches to security, Japan since the late 1990s has become one of the global leaders to promote and implement that concept. It has emphasised the 'freedom from want' aspect, but has also stressed human fulfilment and development as priority objectives, realising them through its ODA policy (see Atanassova-Cornelis 2006). In 1999, Japan launched the Trust Fund for Human Security in the UN. Tokyo's donations have supported UN-related organisations to implement projects, which address various human security threats and primarily target the least developed countries, as well as those dealing with post-conflict situations (Atanassova-Cornelis 2006). The EU, for its part, has recently focused on the concept when a report entitled *A Human Security Doctrine for Europe* was presented in 2004 by a private study group to the EU High Representative for CFSP Javier Solana. In contrast to Japan's approach, the report embraces the 'freedom from fear' aspect of human security, by emphasising the protection of people in conflict areas and hence addressing "situations of severe physical insecurity" (Study Group on Europe's Security Capabilities 2004). Proposing that Europe should develop a so-called "Human Security Response Force" composed of both military and civilian personnel, the report is based on the ESDP's approach of combining both types of instruments (Howorth 2005). Indeed, the envisaged European civilian capabilities (*e.g.* police, humanitarian experts) present the EU with opportunities to collaborate with Japan on the 'freedom from fear' aspect, while the broad approach to security embraced by the ESS is a basis for joint actions in the 'freedom from want' dimension.

Against this background, the two partners have in the past couple of years stressed their intention to pursue a dialogue on human security, as well as to jointly promote that concept in the UN General Assembly (EU-Japan Summit 2008, 2009). In this regard, the latest summit underscored the human security aspect in Africa, and Brussels and Tokyo have decided to bring up the "perspective of protecting and empowering individuals" for discussion at the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the 65th Session of the UN General Assembly in 2010 (EU-Japan Summit 2010). To be sure, Euro-Japanese cooperation on human security is still rather modest, and a common strategy concerning the implementation of the concept is highly desirable (Reiterer 2006) if the two partners really want to make a difference from a human security perspective.

An important area of the bilateral security cooperation in the first objective of the Action Plan, *i.e.* the promotion of peace and security, deserving special attention is conflict prevention and peace building. Linked to human security, this area, too, reflects the

emphasis both Tokyo and Brussels place on economic and non-military instruments of power in their respective foreign policies. The EU has since the late 1990s adopted a comprehensive approach to conflict prevention and peace building. Indeed, Europe's negative experience with successive Balkan conflicts was a clear illustration of the high (human and financial) costs of military crisis management, and underscored the importance of a civilian dimension in the EU's ability to address and, more importantly, prevent crises (Duke 2008). Its holistic approach aims to shape the political, legal, socio-economic and security structures in the countries concerned in order to tackle conflicts at their root, address sources of structural instability and, ultimately, promote a peaceful environment (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008). Japan, for its part, announced in 2002 the concept of "the consolidation of peace", which were to become an important component of Tokyo's comprehensive way to addressing crises. The concept rests on a three-pillar structure of the promotion of peace-processes (*e.g.* mediation), securing of domestic stability and safety (*e.g.* UN PKO), and provision of humanitarian and reconstruction assistance (*e.g.* return of refugees and infrastructure restoration) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 2003: 134). Japan's 2003 ODA Charter identified peace building as one of ODA's priority issues with the consolidation of peace initiative playing a critical role in this process.

Tokyo and Brussels have cooperated in non-military crisis management and post-conflict reconstruction, based on their shared view of the need for a comprehensive approach in this area. Some of their initiatives include organising international conferences on reconstruction aid to Afghanistan in 2002 and on peace consolidation of the Western Balkans in 2004, close cooperation on assistance to Afghanistan in the fields of rural development, police and judicial reforms, and joint promotion of the peace process in Sri Lanka. Other examples of security cooperation, in particular in the area of post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation development, are the Japan-EU actions in the rebuilding of the Western Balkans, especially Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.⁸

It is important to stress that Japan and the EU have also tackled hard security issues, notably arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. These fall into the first objective of the Action Plan and have been on the bilateral agenda since the early 1990s. For example, following the adoption of the 1991 Hague Declaration, Japan and Europe submitted a proposal for the establishment of a UN Register of Conventional Arms, which represented their first joint initiative and was launched in 1992. More recently, in 2004, the two partners adopted a Joint Declaration on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation with a view to promoting universal adherence to all treaties and instruments in this area. Japan and the EU have further jointly supported the reform of the Conventional Weapons Protocol on anti-personnel landmines, as well as the conclusion of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. The main criticism of their cooperation has been that Brussels and Tokyo have failed so far to match their commitments on paper with visible policy initiatives concerning non-proliferation and disarmament (Berkofsky 2008). Indeed, Japan's continuing emphasis on the need for the US nuclear umbrella (to address the military threat from Pyongyang), Tokyo's rather passive role, until recently, in the Iranian issue and the EU's limited influence on the de-nuclearisation of North Korea (not least due to its non-participation in the Six-Party Talks) may have undermined Euro-Japanese cooperation on nuclear disarmament.

⁸ For more examples of bilateral security cooperation, see Hook *et al.* 2005.

Conclusion

Since the early 1990s, political and security cooperation between the EU and Japan has emerged as an important aspect of their relations. It would be correct to assert that, in the first decade after the adoption of the Action Plan, the bilateral partnership has become more goal-oriented and has acquired a certain strategic dimension. This is seen in the two partners' increased emphasis on a convergence of values and security approaches, as well as in their efforts to coordinate policies and undertake more joint actions in pursuit of common goals. Indeed, as a reflection of the shared civilian power focus, Brussels and Tokyo have primarily pursued initiatives that tackle non-traditional security challenges. This move towards joint actions is particularly significant if compared with the mutual ignorance, which characterised Euro-Japanese relations during the Cold War period. Nevertheless, the international significance of the EU-Japan partnership remains largely limited (Berkofsky 2008), while the potential for bilateral cooperation continues to exceed the achievements so far. This naturally raises the following question: to what extent have their relations become genuinely strategic, as argued at the official level, and different, for example, from other relations that Japan and Europe each have with other international actors?

Two main constraints suggest that, in the foreseeable future, it will be unlikely for the EU-Japan partnership to move far beyond its current 'paper value' and, hence, to become more intense. Although Europe in recent years has expressed willingness to strengthen its engagement with East Asia, this continues to be a rather rhetorical commitment and it is the 'China obsession' that drives the EU's Asia policy. Obviously, such an approach hinders Brussels' cooperation with Tokyo, for which the region occupies a central place in its strategic considerations and China is seen as a challenge. Euro-Japanese cooperation is also constrained by the difficulties Brussels and Tokyo each face in promoting themselves as international political and security actors. Indeed, Europe's ability to forge common positions, especially in the areas of security and defence, continues to be limited, while Japan remains committed to a US-centred foreign policy.

From another standpoint, the shared values, goals and security approaches do form an important basis for Brussels and Tokyo to jointly promote non-traditional security issues in the international arena. As this article has demonstrated, Europe and Japan have come a long way in understanding one another and in realising that there is a lot that can bring them together. In this sense, the mutual recognition by Brussels and Tokyo of one another's similarities, and of the importance of strengthened bilateral ties for achieving shared foreign policy goals, have made them natural strategic partners, albeit still more at a rhetorical than operational level. It is clear that if Japan and the EU really want to be taken seriously (and the latest bilateral summit does suggest this), they need to enhance their bilateral cooperation in those areas, namely falling within the scope of soft security, which present the greatest potential for joint initiatives. Brussels and Tokyo also need to deepen their strategic dialogue on East Asia. This will provide Europe with a better understanding of the regional geopolitical and security dynamics and, in turn, make it a more valuable partner to Japan. While these steps will not necessarily make the EU-Japan partnership a genuinely strategic one, they will certainly make it more visible to the world. If Japan and Europe can really make a difference in tackling some of the 21st century's most pressing challenges, then the 'label' will not matter that much.

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