

On the uses and functions of 'strategic partnership' in international politics:  
Implications for agency, policy and theory

by Luis Fernando de Moraes y Blanco

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Supervisor 1: Prof. Dr. Mathias Albert, Bielefeld University  
Supervisor 2: Prof. Dr. Andreas Vasilache, Bielefeld University

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## Introduction

The nature and function of language has been part of the disciplinary debate in International Relations theory (IR) since the 1980s. Yet, despite the influence of the linguistic turn in IR and the development of a number of post-modern, post-positivist and post-structuralist approaches that oppose the dominance of a materialist ontology and a positivist epistemology in the discipline, these theoretical inputs have not often been placed in the service of policy analysis and policy-making. Though there have been significant changes and important contributions in the discipline, mainstream IR remains a locus of ‘rationalism’. ‘Meaning’ is mostly taken as a constant, and ‘language’ as a tool for communication and an instrument for empty political rhetoric.

This project emerged from the analysis of a very specific object: the strategic partnership between the European Union (EU) and Russia. In the late 1990s and early 2000s EU representatives and Russian government officials struggled to find mutually acceptable terms for the development of a cooperative bilateral engagement amid a scenario of internal political transformation both in Russia and in the EU. In this context, Western policy analysts<sup>1</sup> saw the declarations from both sides, which framed this bilateral relationship as a ‘strategic partnership’, as problematic. They asked themselves how a relationship could be defined as a ‘strategic partnership’ when EU and Russia supposedly did not share the same values, seemed to disagree more than could find common interests, and did not trust each other. These negative analyses had an important impact on the perceptions of the European audience – including the foreign policy-makers of EU Member States – about the real possibilities the EU had in establishing a cooperative relationship with Russia.

This thesis argues that these analyses had a problem. It was not only the fact that they pointed out a challenging scenario for the EU-Russia engagement that was problematic. More troubling was the fact that they based their conclusions on the assumption that EU and Russia should not label their relationship as a ‘strategic partnership’ given the characteristics of their bilateral engagement. These authors were acting as if they knew what a ‘strategic partnership’ was. The certainty that the EU-Russia relationship did not correspond to this particular ‘standard’ form of cooperative association led them to call into question the ability of these actors to engage in these terms.

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<sup>1</sup> Danilov and De Spiegeleire (1998); Medvedev (2006); Kempe and Smith (2006); Krastev (2007).

Thus the EU-Russia case presented an opportunity to reflect on the question of what defines a strategic partnership in international politics.<sup>2</sup> What do foreign policy-makers mean when they establish a ‘strategic partnership’? What are the basic assumptions of this form of engagement between international political actors? What are the common goals that motivate this kind of association? How should strategic partners behave towards each other?

The problem is that the EU-Russia relationship is not the only example of ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics. There have been other relationships between international political actors labeled as such before. Furthermore, as it will be discussed in Chapter 3, ‘strategic partnership’ increasingly turned into a common expression in the vocabulary made available to foreign policy-makers. The use of this term is growing but it is still not clear what a ‘strategic partnership’ actually entails. In spite of that, political analysts do not refrain from providing assessments about the successes and failures of these relationships. To do that they assume they know what ‘strategic partnership’ means. Renard (2012, p. 2), for example, states that the concept ‘remains ill defined’ yet discusses ‘principles for true strategic partnerships’. This takes us to a very important question: how can one evaluate the successes and failures of a ‘strategic partnership’ if one does not know what a ‘strategic partnership’ is? In addition, if one does not know the answer to this first question, how can one discuss and enumerate ‘principles for true strategic partnerships’? These questions should be answered. However one basic question precedes all others: can and should we establish an all-encompassing definition for ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics?

This thesis argues that the theoretical effort should not be to try to stabilize ‘strategic partnership’ and fixate the meaning of this term in the vocabulary of international politics. Moreover, any analysis should not attempt to claim if a particular relationship is a ‘true strategic partnership’ or not but instead try to understand what comprises a ‘strategic partnership’. The questions and the research proposal are different because they are drawn from different ontological and epistemological assumptions.

This thesis does not match the positivist endeavor and does not aim to demonstrate the causal link between an independent and a dependent variable. It is also not deconstructive in a post-structural sense. It aims at problematizing the notion of ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics with the goal to increase our understanding of its functions as a political

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<sup>2</sup> It should be pointed out that my analysis will not be limited to the boundaries of the discipline of International Relations. The thesis presents a pluralist theoretical account that draws on the contributions of different disciplines of the social sciences. It will take into consideration the existence of state and non-state actors within a broader scope of agency. Thus, it will focus on the uses of language by ‘international political actors’, be them state actors or not.

concept. The idea is simple: I do not want to define the meaning of ‘strategic partnership’ but to understand the meanings of ‘strategic partnership’. I want to discuss what international political actors try to achieve through the use of this term and determine the implications of its use for policy and agency. This is a proposal that depends on a particular ontology; one that is centered on language.

The argument developed in this project draws on constructivist approaches in IR since it assumes that ontology is not a given nor static. The world, international politics, international political actors, their values and interests are socially constructed. And the only way to make sense of this socially constructed reality is to look at the processes in which actors, their locus of interaction, and their rules of engagement are constituted. One has to assess how ideas are communicated, debated, accepted or declined. Social reality is constituted through language and this should be the key to an approach on ‘strategic partnership’.

‘Strategic partnership’ is a new term that has been used in different ways by the various international political actors that are active in the international arena. Therefore the goal of this thesis is not to try to encapsulate the meaning of this expression in international politics. In this context, an approach based on *Begriffsgeschichte*<sup>3</sup> would not be suitable to this project. The problem with such an approach is that although it envisages change in the semantic meaning of political concepts in a historical period, it fixates the meaning of concepts in particular points in time. ‘Strategic partnership’ should not be treated as a descriptive concept. It is a political concept. It is a term used by international political actors to act upon their counterparts.

What is being proposed is neither historical semantic analysis, nor critical analysis, nor post-structural deconstruction. Wittgenstein (1953, 1969) is my theoretical reference since he offers, through the notion of ‘language game’, a possibility to discuss ‘meaning’ without stabilizing it. By linking meaning to the uses that are made of words, Wittgenstein (1953, §43) gives us the possibility to meaningfully assess ‘strategic partnership’ as a fluid political concept. This is complemented by the contribution of ‘speech act theory’. Austin (1962) developed the notion of performative language, the idea that speaking is a form of action and that our enunciations can be categorized according to what we intend to achieve. This thesis will thus draw on the performative use of ‘strategic partnership’ as a speech act enunciated by representatives of international political actors – like states or the EU – to act in international politics. It will discuss the applications of this expression in the language of international politics and the functions of ‘strategic partnership’ as a speech act.

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<sup>3</sup> Koselleck et al. (2006).



To be able to succeed this project needs to be supported by a theoretical framework that not only allows for a discussion of the functions of ‘strategic partnership’ as a performative expression, but also as foreign policy concept. It has been argued that one should not aim at stabilizing the meaning of ‘strategic partnership’ and that the different meanings of this term are developed within multiple language games. Despite that, it must be acknowledged that these language games are not completely closed linguistic systems. Actors like the European Union have been establishing ‘strategic partnerships’ with a number of international political actors. And the language enunciated by EU representatives within the framework of interaction with each one of their strategic partners is connected to the EU’s foreign policy strategy. ‘Strategic partnership’ is a foreign policy concept within the EU foreign policy, but its ‘meaning’ varies in each one of the bilateral relationship in which it is applied.

In this context, ‘strategic partnership’ must be assessed by way of a two-level approach. On the first level – a systemic one – it must be discussed how ‘strategic partnership’ is integrated in the process of foreign policy conceptualization of the parties involved. On the second level – that of interaction between units – it must be discussed how the actors involved make use of ‘strategic partnership’ to frame their bilateral relationship. One of the main contributions that this thesis makes is to present a coherent pluralistic approach to understand the uses and meanings of ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics. It is a pluralistic approach because it draws on assumptions of different disciplines and theoretical frameworks, such as the Philosophy of Language, Pragmatics, Positioning Theory, the English School of International Relations and Social Constructivism, to develop a methodological approach to understand ‘strategic partnership’. The English School will be used as the theoretical structure reference because it is an approach that deals both with order (structural regularity) and change (structural change). It presents an ontology based on concepts like ‘international society’, which allow us to problematize the uses of ‘strategic partnership’ as a foreign policy concept with constitutive implications for agency and structure.

It should be pointed out that although this thesis does not follow a positivist epistemology, the empirical element remains essential. The approach has important theoretical implications but the goal is ultimately to develop a framework to support policy analysis and assess the socio-political reality in which ‘strategic partnership’ is employed. In this context, one of the big challenges is the necessity to limit the object of empirical observation. Unfortunately, it would be impossible within the limits of this project to conduct a linguistic analysis of all the language games in ‘which strategic partnership’ is used in international politics. From the outset it must be said that this thesis does not aim to provide all the answers

about the meanings of ‘strategic partnership’. In any case, that was never the purpose of this project. It is important to stress that the main goal of this thesis is to provide an alternative approach to assess the uses of ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics.

In this context, I will focus on the strategic partnerships of the European Union, and especially on the relationships between the European Union and the BRIC countries: Brazil, Russia, India and China. These case studies were selected for specific reasons. First, the European Union is an international political actor that has officially integrated ‘strategic partnership’ into its foreign policy. In the *European Security Strategy* (2003), ‘strategic partnership’ was presented as one of the instruments available to the EU to pursue its foreign policy agenda. Second, the BRIC countries are international political actors that have very particular and complex foreign policy agendas. Although these countries have established the BRIC group – now BRICS after the accession of South Africa – they pursue different foreign policy approaches that influence the framework of the ‘strategic partnerships’ each one of them has been developing with the EU. The relationships between the EU and the BRIC countries have the potential to enrich a discussion on the different uses of ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics. Finally, it is important to stress that since the empirical analysis will focus on language in use, it is necessary to have access to the sources that allows the discussion to be conducted. The European Union and the BRIC countries have been organizing summits within the framework of their ‘strategic partnerships’. The speeches and declarations produced in these bilateral encounters are important and openly available sources for a linguistic analysis of the uses of ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics.

Another point that should be emphasized concerns the matter of whose declarations and whose speech acts will be analyzed. By no means is it my intention to treat the European Union and any of the BRIC countries as personifiable entities. Speech act and positioning theory are employed in the areas of Pragmatics and Social Psychology in the analysis of linguistic interactions between individuals. The fact that these theoretical frameworks will be applied to assess the linguistic environments in which the engagement between international political actors like the EU and the BRIC countries take place, does not mean that the ‘actorness’ of these agents is neglected. In Chapter 4 I will show that the EU foreign policy cannot be set apart of the *sui generis* nature of this actor as a political entity. Many actors and many voices contribute to the framing of a foreign policy discourse that is taken by the audience as the ‘EU foreign policy’ (Lucarelli, 2006). To a different extent and in different degrees this is what also happens with each of the BRIC countries. Thus it is important to stress that this thesis considers that the international political actors, mentioned in the discussion of the case studies conducted

in Chapters 5 to 8, are no ‘black boxes’, that is, the enunciations quoted in the empirical analyses belong to representatives and officials of these international political actors.

This thesis will be divided into three parts and nine chapters. Part I will discuss the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions on which the project is based. Chapter 1 will present the language-based assumptions drawn from the Philosophy of Language, Pragmatics, Positioning Theory and Social Constructivism, on which a linguistic approach to ‘strategic partnership’ is framed. Chapter 2 will complement this discussion, arguing in favor of an approach that merges basic concepts of the English School of International Relations and ‘language in use’ approaches.

Part II will be a general discussion on ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics. Chapter 3 will problematize the use of this expression in the discourse of international politics. It will provide a review of the literature on the topic and will argue in favor of an alternative approach to ‘strategic partnership’ centered on the uses and functions of this expression as a ‘speech act’. Chapter 4 will discuss the functions of this term within the European Union foreign policy. It will address the context in which ‘strategic partnership’ has been turned into one of the key EU foreign policy concepts. In this chapter the last pieces that compose the methodology developed to discuss the uses of ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics will be merged together into a two-level approach.

Part III is dedicated to the linguistic analysis *per se*. Chapters 5 to 8 will each conduct a thorough analysis of the conversational stories developed between the EU and the BRIC countries. Chapter 5 will discuss the uses made by the EU and Russia of the term ‘strategic partnership’ to frame their bilateral relationship. The time frame of analysis starts with the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* (1994) and goes until the thirtieth bilateral summit, which took place in December 2012. Chapter 6 will address the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’ focusing on the engagement between these parties in the period between 1992 and the sixth bilateral summit in January 2013. Chapter 7 is dedicated to an analysis of the EU-China ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’, focusing on a period that initiates with the first bilateral summit in 1998 and ends with the sixteenth bilateral summit held in November 2013. Chapter 8 will discuss the bilateral engagement between the European Union and India, focusing on the language enunciated by the parties to frame their relationship from 1993 until the twelfth bilateral summit held in February 2012. Finally, Chapter 9 concludes the thesis. It will discuss the implications of the analyses made from Chapters 5 to 8 to our understanding of the EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’ and of the meanings of ‘strategic partnership’ in international

politics. Furthermore, it will draw important conclusions related to the use of 'strategic partnership' for agency, policy and theory.

This thesis aims at establishing a pluralistic and language-based theoretical framework to assess the functions of 'strategic partnership' in international politics. The goal of the discussion is to move away from approaches that take 'strategic partnership' as a descriptive concept and argue that this concept is not only a label, but a foreign policy concept with implications for the framing of the constitutive rules of single bilateral relationships and thus for agency in international politics. I will demonstrate that 'language in' use approaches can offer a different understanding of social reality and change our view of political relations, in turn, opening new paths in terms of theory and policy-making.

## Part I

# Language and Theoretical Assumptions

## 1 Defining Language-Based Assumptions

This thesis focuses on a specific phenomenon of contemporary international relations: the establishment of ‘strategic partnerships’. Yet, one must clearly present the assumptions on which the approach to this object of analysis is based. This discussion is necessary for understanding the reasons why a discussion on language is brought into this project.

At the end of the 1980s International Relations theory found itself divided. Or at least that is how Keohane (1988) saw it in *International Institutions: two approaches*, when this author acknowledged the existence of two main groups in this field of study: rationalists and reflectivists. In *The Third Debate: On the Prospects of International Theory in a Post-Positivist Era*, Lapid (1989) observed a great divide in the area as well but expressed this rift in terms of a *post-positivist debate*. Hence, it is important to discuss how the linguistic turn is positioned in the context of this disciplinary debate.

Smith (1996) discusses the central spot occupied by positivism in the social sciences. This variant of positivism, which the author distinguishes from Comte's positivism and the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle, is said to have four central features:

‘first, logicism, the view that the objective confirmation of scientific theory should conform to the canons of deductive logic; second, empirical verificationism, the idea that only statements that are either empirically verifiable or falsifiable (...) or true by definition (...) are scientific; third, theory and observation distinction, the view that there is a strict separation between observations and theories, with observations being seen as theoretically neutral; finally, the Humean theory of causation, the idea that establishing a causal relationship is a matter of discovering the invariant temporal relationship between observed events.’ (Smith, 1996, p. 15)

According to Smith (1996), this form of positivism has shaped International Relations Theory since the 1950s and has underscored four main assumptions: the naturalist belief that the same epistemology and methodology apply to all realms of science, the distinction between facts and values and the belief that ‘facts are theory neutral’, the belief in regularities in social sciences, and finally the adoption of an empiricist epistemology focused on validation or falsification (Smith, 1996, p. 16). Thus, the author saw positivism in IR as a ‘methodological commitment, tied to an empiricist epistemology’, which resulted in ‘a very restricted range of permissible ontological claims’ (Smith, 1996, p. 17).

Central to the empiricist/positivist epistemology in IR is the belief that like in the natural sciences, social scientists can objectively observe the social reality and rationally propose hypotheses and find causal links that explain the behavior of actors. Moreover, recurrent patterns of behavior are believed to exist and to be based on basic assumptions about what motivates action. The problem with this epistemology is how it grounds the construction of

knowledge in a group of selected assumptions and, by doing so, does not problematize the foundations that condition how the world is observed and explained.

The post-positivist/post-modern critique attacks precisely these rational and empirical foundations that ground the search for discourses of ‘truth’ on a neutral objective science. According to this perspective, the affirmation of a scientific truth is the byproduct of power relations construed and sustained by logocentric structures, which render impossible the existence of neutral science. Hence, this critique focuses on the search for causal explanations based on pre-given assumptions about what constitutes the social reality. Moreover, assumptions are also based on the ‘logocentric disposition’ (Onuf, 1989, p. 40) that tries to find a point of departure for the production of knowledge and sustains an ontology that is based, for example, on sovereign state actors whose actions are informed by fixed interests, which can be seen as independent variables causing specific and expected sets of behavior in the international realm.

Although it is necessary to acknowledge the pertinence of the post-positivist/post-modern critique and take into consideration the fact that any scientific explanation can be understood as just one discourse of truth produced by relations of domination in a power-knowledge nexus – what is in my view an extremely relevant epistemological perspective – my study presents a framework that, although opposing foundationalism and positivism and its search for neutral explanations, is not a deconstructionist critique. Rather, I shall develop an approach that opposes claims for totalizing truth and stabilizations of meaning and transcends a simple explanation. It is an approach that emphasizes the perspective of understanding, focused on meaning, which incorporates elements of critical approaches and is close to an interpretive/hermeneutical epistemology. This epistemological approach is described by Smith (1996, pp. 26-27) as follows:

‘[d]eveloping out of textual analysis, hermeneutics, as developed by Dilthey in the nineteenth century, starts from the premise that the analysis of nature and the analysis of the mind are very different enterprises. For Dilthey, each required a very different form of analysis, contra positivism, and these form of analysis are what we now call explaining and understanding. (...) hermeneutics reverses the argument of traditional epistemology and instead of a being interpreting a world sees a being formed by tacit know-how which is prior to the interpretation of facts, events, or data. Individuals are caught up in a hermeneutic circle whereby we can only understand the world by our being caught up in a web of significance. Hermeneutics in short, has ontological significance, which means that the traditional concerns of epistemology are inappropriate for understanding and making sense of our beliefs, since they posit the interpretive or observing subject as in some way prior to questions about the nature of being.’

My argument focuses on language because when the focus turns to language the ontology is not pre-determined. Instead of a priori actors, assumptions, interests and a whole social reality, I shall stress how the enunciation of language and the production of

communication establish not only the interlocutors involved in a specific relational context, but also the vocabulary that gives meaning to the rules of agency that constitute and regulate this relationship. Instead of a fixed origin based on a pre-defined ontology, different moments in time are observed and, with a look into processes and language in use, I can provide an understanding of political relations without trying to establish causal links and recurrent patterns and not even claiming a scientific truth.

This general introduction to the following chapters aims to provide, in brief, the context in which a contribution of the debates on language acquires relevance. Since one of the goals of this thesis is to provide an account of the context in which the concept of ‘strategic partnership’ emerges, how it is implemented and the countless kinds of relationship it makes possible among international political actors, one of the topics that must be discussed is how the contributions of the debate on language may provide a framework to cope with the functions of the use of this new term in international politics. Like many analysts of International Relations (e.g. Onuf, Fierke, the Copenhagen School of security) I argue that some elements discussed by language philosophers and pragmatists can provide us with some important tools for understanding why the use of the expression ‘strategic partnership’ should be problematized and how its functions in contemporary international politics can be understood.

This chapter is broken down as follows. Firstly, some topics discussed by philosophers of language and pragmatists will be discussed. The aim of this first section is to point out some epistemological and ontological elements that can help to better cope with the relations between language and reality and political terms and the realities of international politics. The following section will briefly discuss how language has been introduced into theoretical approaches to International Relations, especially in Constructivism, with its innovations and limitations. In the third section I will point out which elements from the debates on language I bring into this dissertation and how they will be treated. Hence, I will start to delineate the assumptions that will guide me along the thesis. A short conclusion in the end of the chapter will allow me to connect this chapter with the next steps that will be taken in the following chapters.

### **1.1 Language in Philosophy and in Pragmatics**

Firstly, I would like to highlight that I am dealing with a very concrete object of analysis: the term ‘strategic partnership’ when applied by international political actors. I would like to provide a better understanding of how this concept started being used in international politics and how it acquired its specific meanings in different relational contexts. In addition, I start with



a very clear assumption: international politics is not an arena of egoistic ‘like-units’ that behave according to a ‘self-help’ logic, as it is believed by realist approaches (Waltz, 1979). It is impossible to conduct my analysis without taking into account the ontological assumption that not only egoistic behavior but also cooperative and friendly behaviors are possible among international political actors. My point is that multiple kinds of relationship are possible in international politics, and that any relationship is framed according to a set of rules that constitute and regulate the relationship in question. Stressing the distinction between norms and rules (Dunne, 2001), one in which norms relate to the macro-framework that structures international society and in which rules, like laws in a micro scope, derive from these norms, I argue that the normative structure of the international society enables context-specific relationships based on specific rules not necessarily based on ideas of enmity. And it is in this way that some discussion on what has been developed in the Philosophy of Language and in Pragmatics, or within debates on Language in general is necessary. Within this context I will try to connect approaches based on language with the framework of the so-called English School of International Relations in the next chapter.

The philosophy of language or ‘linguistic philosophy’ ‘is the view that philosophical problems are problems that may be solved (or dissolved) either by reforming language, or by understanding more about the language we presently use’ (Rorty, 1968, p. 3). This definition makes reference to the debate between ideal and ordinary language, more specifically between philosophers writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, like Bertrand Russell, who approached the relationship between language and philosophy and studied it with the aim to correct its inconsistencies and improve it through the development of an ideal language, and those, like Austin and other so-called pragmatists, that studied the use of language and the communication of meaning independently of its possible defects, i.e. its use in everyday life (Thomas, 1995, p. 29).<sup>4</sup> Whereas the debate on an ideal language would be contained within philosophy, the interests in ordinary language and meaning in use would transcend its original academic discipline to the whole of the social sciences through the linguistic turn. The philosopher most often associated with this movement is Ludwig Wittgenstein. Since my goal is to better understand the use and the meaning(s) of the term ‘strategic partnership’, ‘the

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<sup>4</sup> I should stress that I will be working with the definition of pragmatics found in Thomas (1995, p. 22) based on meaning in interaction. The author points out that ‘[t]his reflects the view that meaning is not something which is inherent in the words alone, nor is it produced by the speaker alone, nor by the hearer alone. Making meaning is a dynamic process, involving the negotiation of meaning between speaker and hearer, the context of utterance (physical, social and linguistic) and the meaning potential of an utterance.’

second' Wittgenstein provides me an interesting framework to deal not only with meaning, but to discuss how meaning is related to rules and change in various processes.

Focusing on ordinary language,<sup>5</sup> Wittgenstein (1953, §43) declared that 'the meaning of a word is its use in language'. From this emphasis on the use of language, the author construed an approach to language and meaning that assumed the multiplicity of kinds of sentences that can be expressed by means of language and consequently the impossibility of establishing fixed meanings to words and concepts (1953, §23). With an ontology based on multiple 'language-games', Wittgenstein overcame the belief in an isomorphic relationship between language and reality that he had developed in the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1921) (Marcondes, 1994, p. 224).

The author defined 'language-games' as 'the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven' (1953, §7). Read (2007, pp. 16-17) explains the idea behind the concept of language-game as follows:

'[i]t is the action, the dynamics, of meaning that the concept of the "language-game" is meant to illustrate. To take any such game merely as a particular closed "context" would be to remain within the narrow "grammatical relations" construal of "use" which I earlier raised serious questions about. Language-games are not occasions merely for the specification or refinement of more general rules of grammar. And even when such grammatical specification is in place - as a set of particular senses for certain "syntaxes", for example - it is still just a set of rules. Such rules must be "applied", must be acted on or from. Before that, one does not as yet even have a language-game, but only the preparation for such a game. Any meaning that might occur with the putting to use of such preparation will not yet then have occurred, and will not so far have been considered.'

Hence, from the idea of language-game, I understand the meaning of a concept or a term not only as the by-product of the rules of a grammar, but also as the by-product of action, which by means of language constitutes and is able to change meaning. Wittgenstein affirms that '[t]hough-one would like to say-every word has a different character in different contexts, at the same time there is *one* character it always has: a single physiognomy. It looks at us. But a face in a *painting* looks at us too' (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 181). From this quotation, I assume the author is stressing how a concept may keep its 'physiognomy' unaltered, while it acquires different meanings in different language-games. And a language-game is understood as a relational context among actors which, established and constrained by specific rules of the context, develop a relationship and exert a mutual influence among each other through actions mobilized via language. Language which is related to rules but is not fixed and changes with time in an ongoing process (Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 34e).

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<sup>5</sup> Standing against the project of an ideal language, the author declared that '[w]hen we talk about language (words, sentences, etc.) I must speak the language of every day. Is this language somehow too coarse and material for what we want to say? Then how is another one to be constructed?-And how strange that we should be able to do anything at all with the one we have!' (Wittgenstein, 1953, §120).

Wittgenstein discussed more thoroughly the transition in language through changes in the meaning of concepts in *On Certainty* (1969). In this book he argued that ‘certain language-games lose some of their importance, while others become important. And in this way there is an alteration -a gradual one- in the use of the vocabulary of a language’ (Wittgenstein, 1969, §63) and that ‘[w]hen language-games change, then there is a change in concepts, and with the concepts the meanings of words change’ (Wittgenstein, 1969, §65). From these assumptions in Wittgenstein's approach, I can develop an epistemological and ontological framework to analyze how the term ‘strategic partnership’ comes into use and how to understand its uses and its meanings.

But first I need to clarify how I should reach this goal. In this regard, Wittgenstein is also helpful when he points out that ‘[o]ne learns the game by watching how others play (...) There are characteristic signs of it in the players' behaviour’ (Wittgenstein, 1953, §54). Opposing a positivist epistemology and stressing a descriptive-analytical one, he also declared that ‘[w]e must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place’ (1953, §109). Eventually, he stressed that ‘[t]he language-games are rather set up as *objects of comparison* which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language by way not only of similarities, but also dissimilarities’ (1953, §130). Hence, starting from Wittgenstein's contribution, my argument and exploration of the meaning(s) of the expression ‘strategic partnership’ should be conducted by means of an analysis and comparison of its different uses, as well as the different language-games in which it is implemented. By observing these language-games, I shall ascertain the ‘rules of the game’, and observe which ones are being ‘obeyed’ (1953, §199) and which are being broken (1953, §201). By understanding how ‘strategic partnership’ is constituted via language, I shall be able to provide a relevant account of this supposedly new concept in the language of international politics.

Wittgenstein was the first of many authors to focus on the understanding of ‘ordinary language’ and meaning. Whereas Wittgenstein made important contributions concerning the focus on ordinary language, the impossibility of fixing meanings, an ontology based on the idea of language-games, and on a epistemology based on the observation of language as a way to understand meaning and the rules of the context, it was Austin (1962) who provided the distinction between ‘constative sentences’ and ‘performative sentences’. ‘Performative sentences’ are those in which ‘the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of an action, which again would not normally be described as saying something’ (Austin, 1962b, p. 5). With Austin the theory of speech acts was created.

According to Austin (1962), the capacity of language to transcend a constative function and perform acts derives from the notion of 'illocutionary force'. The author asserts that each utterance is composed of three acts: the locutionary act is the act of uttering a sentence, of proposing its content; the illocutionary act is the one that provides the hearer with the action that the speaker aims to perform through the utterance; and the perlocutionary act is the following act of the hearer or audience that confirms the successful accomplishment of the action proposed in the illocutionary act.

In this context, although there is a similarity between Wittgenstein and Austin in that both acknowledge the constitutive or performative nature of language, they present contrasting approaches to language when the limits of language are observed. Whereas Wittgenstein pointed out the possibility of 'countless' language-games, Austin presented an approach that assumed a limit to the types of performances that can be carried out through language. He elaborated a taxonomy of performative verbs, which is related to the kinds of action that can be performed by each verb. Austin's 'performative hypothesis' would later collapse with the observation that it is possible to perform an act through language without the enunciation of a performative verb (Thomas, 1995, p. 46) but his taxonomy of performative verbs was extremely relevant for the establishment of pragmatics.

Austin's taxonomy composed five classes of verbs: veridictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives and expositives (Austin, 1962b, p. 150). Subsequently, there would be many reformulations of the categories of performatives. Thomas (1995), for example, would later categorize the performative verbs as metalinguistic, ritual, collaborative and group performatives. But the most relevant categorization in the context of this thesis is the one developed by Searle (1979), who also identified five categories: assertives, directives, compromissives, expressives and declarations. The three first categories are the ones later incorporated into the framework of Onuf (1989) and can be understood as follows: assertives are sentences that can be evaluated according to a true-false logic (Searle, 1979, p. 19); directives are sentences that intend to guide the hearer of following a specific behavior (Searle, 1979, p. 21); and compromissives are sentences that intend to commit the speaker to a future behavior (Searle, 1979, p. 22). Searle would later stand out with his theory of indirect speech acts (Thomas, 1995, p. 93) but following the goals of the present thesis, I limit the references to his approach on rules.

Similar to Wittgenstein, Searle (1969, pp. 367-37; apud Sadock, 2006, p. 60) affirmed that 'speaking a language is performing acts according to rules' and rules are understood as 'a conventional association between a certain kind of act and its socially determined

consequences' (Sadock, 2006, p. 60). To felicitously perform an illocutionary act, some conventional rules must be followed. And these conditions of performance would be the object of study of Searle and other pragmatists. Following the language-game framework of Wittgenstein and Searle's approach to rules, an important topic of discussion of the present thesis is how 'strategic partnership' allows the constitution of different rules, different games of 'strategic partnership'.

Another notion that helps me to better understand the meaning behind the expression 'strategic partnership' is found in the work of Paul Grice. This author is known for pointing out the difference between saying and implicating (Clark, 2007, p. 141). Thomas explains Grice's work in this area as an 'attempt at explaining how a hearer gets from what is said to what is meant, from the level of expressed meaning to the level of implied meaning' (Thomas, 1995, p. 56). The idea of implicature can be understood as 'a component of speaker meaning that constitutes an aspect of what is meant in a speaker's utterance without being part of what is said' (Horn, 2006, p. 3). Sadock (2006, p. 59) mentions two types of implicatures: normal implicatures that are 'things that are communicated beyond what is said'; and 'conversational implicatures', which are 'those that depend on the assumption that the speaker is being cooperative'. One of the goals of my thesis is precisely to try to cope with the meaning implicated by international political actors when they use the term 'strategic partnership'.

The last pragmatist that I should mention is Clark (2007). Two ideas from this author should be highlighted. The first is the concept of 'common ground', which is the 'great mass of knowledge, beliefs and suppositions that they [speaker and hearer] believe they share' (Clark, 2007, p. 12). To try to grasp the rules of the game of strategic partnership that is being played, I must first understand the common ground in which these rules come into being. In this context, I should try to relate the idea of 'strategic partnership' with other notions like friendship, rivalry and enmity and the discussion on the role of 'common values'. A second idea is the assumption already found in Wittgenstein that 'language use is really a form of joint action (...) It is the joint action that emerges when speakers and listeners – or writers and readers – perform their individual actions in coordination, as ensembles' (Clark, 2007, p. 3). This notion of Clark is relevant because it seems to stress the co-responsibility between all the parties that are present in a language-game.

Language, its complexity, use and meaning are the object of countless studies and analysis. Thus, taking into consideration my main goal of analyzing a phenomenon of international politics, it is not necessary to overemphasize these approaches on language. My goal is to point out some theoretical elements that help me to better understand the different

aspects of a specific phenomenon of international politics. In this regard, my discussion of language has been a cursory one. After presenting some ideas and concepts found within linguistic philosophy and pragmatics, I would like to briefly point out one more contribution. It is an approach outside linguistic philosophy and pragmatics that can be interesting in the context of the present thesis and that may present a different account to the theme. Lasswell (1965) presented a political discussion on how the use of language relates to power, and how words are an important and efficient instrument in power maximizing strategies. The author asserts that:

*'(...) symbols (words and images) affect power as they affect expectations of power. If we verify or apply these propositions, it is necessary to know certain facts about any given audience. What symbols do they recognize as designating power, and as expressing changes in degrees of power? What media of communication come to their attention, and what attitudes toward these media affect the construction given to symbols appearing in them? What style of statement affects the attitude taken toward the purport of a statement?'* (Lasswell, 1965, p. 19)

This quotation helps me underline how a concept comes into being and how it can communicate or impose an asymmetrical relationship without expressly doing so. This point will be relevant when I discuss why the term 'strategic partnership' is sometimes chosen and used when the kind of relationship he constitutes can traduce disequilibrium in power relations but is in any case better accepted by the audience since it does not carry the negative charge of other terms. Hence, I argue that the use of the 'strategic partnership' language may be a soft instrument of power projection, which gains acceptance for its neutrality in comparison to other concepts that have been used in international politics.

## **1.2 Language and International Relations**

In the introduction to this chapter I mentioned the post-positivist debate and where it is positioned in the theoretical debates of International Relations. Now, I turn my focus to the issue of language within International Relations theory.

A focus on language in International Relations is not something new. 'Discourse analysis', for example, was a common methodology used by foreign policy analysts during the Cold War. However, an approach to language in terms of what has been discussed in the last section, i.e. following the presumption of a constitutive character of language, would be only later incorporated to the theoretical debates of the discipline by some of the so-called 'reflexivists' in the context of the post-positivist debate. Yet, although this extensive and heterogeneous 'group', composed of so-called critical theorists, feminists, post-colonialists, post-moderns, post-structuralists, and some constructivists, stand out in their problematization of stabilizations in the production of knowledge in the discipline, not all of them would focus

on the linguistic element in carrying out with their projects. Despite it not being exclusively taken by constructivists, the linguistic turn would become one of the most representative features of these approaches. Fierke (2006, p. 173) even states that ‘Constructivism is (...) first and foremost an epistemological position, heavily indebted to the so-called “linguistic turn”’.

However, I should point out that not all self-called constructivist approaches take the linguistic turn into account. Whereas Wendt (1999) is one example of a constructivist approach that does not incorporate a discussion of language and does not even entirely abandon a positivist epistemology, Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (2004) are one example of incorporating speech act theory to an assessment of a construction of existential threats in security. One way to understand the constructivist major premises is to look at the disagreement concerning an individualist ontology and an emphasis on a social ontology (Fierke, 2006, p. 170), and the opposition to any ontological antecedence between agents and structures and the belief on the construction of agents interests and preferences through interaction (Messari and Nogueira, 2005). Nevertheless, any attempt to establish assumptions common to all so-called constructivists would not provide an all-encompassing account of this heterogeneous label. I focus then on the contribution of two constructivists that take the linguistic turn into their theoretical frameworks.

In my view, Onuf (1989) is the first notable contribution that brings language into a reconstruction of knowledge production in International Relations theory. Providing the first systematic approach that tries to connect the performative character of language and International Relations theory, *The World of Our Making* is a relevant effort at overcoming the negligence of previous approaches by insisting in the idea that it is possible to have access to both material and social aspects of reality while developing an approach that comprehends the complexity of international relations.

Onuf (1989) denies the presumption of anarchy, i.e. the belief that the international realm – in opposition to the domestic realm where the state has the authority to provide order – is an arena where like-units interact without the presence of a superior authority. However, that does not mean for the author that the incidence of anarchy is not possible. It is the condition of anarchy, defined as the absence of rule, which is rejected (Onuf, 1989, p. 167). According to Onuf (1989), relations of super- and subordination characterize the political realm, and three categories of rule are possible in any political environment and consequently in the international political environment: hegemony, hierarchy and heteronomy. According to the author these three conditions of rule are constituted by rules and it is at this moment that language is brought into his argument.

The second Wittgenstein is considered by Onuf (1989) as the rediscover of the place of rules in language and in society (Onuf, 1989, p.47). From the idea of 'language game', it is possible to discover the relevance of the rules that 'govern language which people then use for social purposes'. And whereas Onuf does not see rules as sufficient conditions of agency, the author considers them as a decisive constitutive element on which the categories of rule are based.

But the strongest influence of the linguistic turn in Onuf's approach (1989) is drawn from Austin's speech act theory. He points out three of the five functional categories of speech act from Searle (assertive, directives, commissives, expressive and declarations) that he believes have the ability to generate rules. Hence, assertive speech acts are seen as generating instruction rules, directive speech acts as generating directive rules, and commissive speech acts as generating commitment rules.

According to his argument there are three forms of rule that derive from three kinds of rules, which, in turn, derive from language and its performative character. That is how the author claims for a correspondence between assertive speech acts and hegemony, directive speech acts and hierarchy, and commissive speech acts and heteronomy.

In that context, it should be stressed that Onuf (1989) proposes an approach that tries to compromise the social centered-belief that something acquires meaning as it is referred to by someone and the materialist belief that reality exists independently of being pointed out by someone. And he does this with a focus on deeds. In his conception, by focusing on deeds one has a false logocentric disposition based on the co-constitution of the material and the social. And if in the beginning are the deeds, it is words that constitute deeds (Onuf, 1989, p. 236). Thus here lies the relevance of language in the constructivist approach of Onuf.

However, drawing on Lasswell's (1949) conception of language as 'nothing more than its content, which elites can change to suit themselves'<sup>6</sup> Onuf (1989, p. 228) presents a picture of the political reality in which the world, its rules and its order are characterized by asymmetries. And instead of using the linguistic turn as an instrument to analyze the complexity and dynamism of socio-political relations, he tries to reduce this complexity to a model that denies the presumption of anarchy and creates a limiting reading of what world politics can be. I do not want to deny the possibility that hegemony, hierarchy and heteronomy are the main kinds of rule found in global politics but, according to an epistemology and an ontology drawn from Wittgenstein, I would argue that world politics is more complex than how it is presented

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<sup>6</sup> Apud. Onuf (1989, p. 228).



by Onuf. In this regard, I position myself closer to the framework developed by Fierke (2002, 2006, 2007; Fierke and Wiener, 1999).

Following Wittgenstein's work, Fierke stands out in the discipline for problematizing the context:

'(...) we want to problematize the context. Rather than taking the rules of any particular game for granted, and focusing on the rationality of decisions within an assumed context, we want to elaborate on the context itself within which the changing identities and interests (...) were invested with social and political meaning. To do so, we suggest elaborating on a Wittgensteinian constructivist approach.' (Fierke and Wiener, 1999, p. 723)

The author opposes the previous approaches that seemed to fixate their observation in a static image of international politics. In this context, she points to the need to a look into the games, its rules and the 'multiple layers of activity and participation' that establish social identities and 'move the material objects across the board' (Fierke, 2002, p. 337) Thus, she provides an emphasis not only in the materiality of international politics but also on social structures, 'structures shaped not only by material power but by social meaning and interaction' (Fierke 2007, p. 61).

In that regard, Fierke developed a framework, which like Onuf's, focuses on rules and social interaction, but that, following Wittgenstein more closely, presupposes the possibility of unlimited forms of relationship between international political actors. In addition, in an approach that suits my goal of analyzing the term 'strategic partnership', the author believes that 'a single word can have any range of meanings when placed in different contexts' (Fierke, 2007, p. 84) because '[t]he practice of *fixing* meaning is in conflict with the goal of mapping a *change* in identities and interests' (Fierke, 2002, p. 343) and the author stresses the necessity of not assuming the existence of given identities and interests. Fierke focuses on processes of interaction in which identities and interests are continuously redefined.

In fact, the most relevant element in Fierke's framework is her focus on the ongoing redefinitions of the games played by international political actors. And not only does she provide a framework to deal with change in international political relationships, she points out 'language' as the instrument through which change is constituted by her mechanism of 'acting as if', which she presents in *Links Across the Abyss* (2002, pp. 338-339). She achieves this by asserting that '[the t]ransition or movement toward a new set of rules often requires a challenge to the prevailing necessity and a willingness to act as if a new logic were possible'. This argument was elaborated thoroughly later on in *Critical Approaches to International Security* (2007, pp. 62-63):

'The power of "acting as if" resides in a double move, that is, in politicizing the rules of the dominant game, by flaunting them, and, at the same time, acting within the framework of a more marginal game that already has meaning within a political context. This created a space of opportunity for leaders such

as Gorbachev and Reagan to “change games”, from one of enemies in a divided Europe to partners in disarmament in a Europe whole and free. (...) As the legitimacy of Cold War security structures was undermined, a different language seeped into the public imagination and was adapted to the interests of political leaders, who then introduced a change in practice.’ (Fierke, 2007, pp. 62-63)

Certainly, change is not easy and takes time in major processes to overcome rules that may be deeply rooted in the mind-set of the players involved. Fierke, for instance, believes that ‘the redefinition of a game is unlikely to begin with those most constrained by it (...), but from “outside”’ (2007, p. 62). However, the fact that she glimpses these possibilities of change is already remarkable in a discipline that for so many decades was reduced to the belief in an anarchical system composed of self-help units. In addition, by acknowledging not only the possibility of change, but also change towards more cooperative and even friendly relationships, Fierke's framework allows me to consider the possibility that the language of ‘strategic partnership’ may be more than mere political rhetoric, and the beginning of positive cooperation that overcomes former conflicting identities.

One last point that I should emphasize is the following. Whereas Fierke opposes stabilizations and is certainly criticizing a positivist epistemology, from an epistemological point of view her account is openly and self-proclaimed critical. In that regard, her project and Wittgenstein’s are visibly different yet both provide me with relevant elements to my approach on ‘strategic partnerships’.

### **1.3 Implementing an Analysis of Language**

In the last two sections, I started to define the epistemological, ontological and methodological grounds that will guide my study of the ‘strategic partnership’ concept. In discussing the contributions of Wittgenstein, for example, I underlined the author’s claims that an understanding of meaning presupposes the abandonment of an epistemology based on explanation and the implementation of one based on understanding and consequently a methodology based on description. Following Wittgenstein and the other mentioned pragmatists, meaning can be understood through observation and comparison of language games or situations where ordinary language is used. Following this methodology, it would be possible to grasp the rules that constitute and regulate a specific context, ascribe meaning to the specific sentences uttered, and understand how behavior relates to the rules of context in different cases.

As Fierke (2007) has pointed out, when such goals are the aim, a positivist epistemology based on causal explanations and search for independent and dependent variables does not exactly suit the proposal. I need a methodology that allows me to “look and see” the matrix of

identities and interests and the process by which they are gradually transformed through historical interactions' (Fierke, 2007, p. 81), a methodology that allows me to do that by focusing on language in use. And the fact that I am focusing on understanding the constitutive character of language and my objects of analysis are texts does not allow me to be less rigorous in my methodology (Fierke, 2007, p. 84).

Fierke's methodology is drawn from Julia Kristeva's concept of 'intertextuality' (2007, p. 93), which refers to the fact that texts are always interwoven with other texts, from which 'speakers', or those that are uttering through speech or written language draw the foundations that sustain their enunciation. It could be said that this emphasis on intertextuality relates to Clark's search of the (2007) 'common ground', which is the key to understand the rules that operate within a language-game.

However, whereas Fierke's incorporation of the idea of intertextual analysis is fundamental, this is just one idea within a more complex framework of critical discourse analysis. Fairclough (1995) developed what he called a 'critical discourse analysis', which he defined as 'an analytical framework for studying connections between language, power and ideology' (p. 23). My study of 'strategic partnership' is not critical enough in the sense of focusing on power and ideology, but I mention the latter to show how my approach stands in relation to other language-based approaches. According to Fairclough (1995, p. 6):

'[t]exts in their ideational functioning constitute systems of knowledge and belief (including what Foucault refer to as "objects"), and in their interpersonal functioning they constitute social objects (or in different terminologies, identities, forms of self) and social relations between (categories of) subjects. Any part of any text can fruitfully be examined in terms of the co-presence and interaction of these constitutive processes.'

In this context, the author argued that any satisfactory analysis of language, its content and meaning must take into consideration what he called the 'content of texture' (p. 5). Fairclough emphasized the necessity to go beyond an approach centered on the analysis of the content of texts and to provide an account of 'texture', the content found in form and organization of texts. It is, according to the author, a partly linguistic and partly intertextual analysis that cannot but enrich social analysis (p. 4-5). Although I agree that the analysis of texture has relevance, mainly in critical and post-structural approaches, my study stands in a more action-centered level of discourse analysis where I focus more on actions performed by means of language than in the analysis of texture *per se*.

Concerning this point, I should underline my epistemological point of view and how it differentiates from post-structuralist approaches that also focus on language but from a deconstructionist position. I do not oppose the claim that 'reality' is constructed from discourses about the 'real', but my approach is not focused on power/knowledge structures. My goal is not

to deconstruct, but to observe the construction of meaning, to observe how the social reality and political relationships are constructed starting from language and without committing myself to a critique of the constituted power structures and of the foundations that sustain such structures. I want to destabilize the notion of ‘strategic partnership’ but not as a way to criticize the asymmetrical structures which are legitimized by this notion, but as a way to understand the process of constitution of these ‘games’, be they asymmetrical or not.

Naturally, by focusing my analysis on the strategic partnership ‘games’, i.e. on how this kind of relationship is constituted through language, I will engage to some extent with the analysis of discursive/textual practices. However, such discursive practices or speech acts shall not be taken as representations of the real that aspire a status of truth but as propositions about what the relationship between the ‘players of the game’ could become, as a way to modify the rules that constitute and regulate this relationship.

Fairclough’s approach thus is suited to my project on a methodological level than on an epistemological level *per se*. The author gives four reasons for a greater emphasis on textual analysis: 1) a theoretical reason that ‘[s]ocial analysts not uncommonly share the misperception of language as transparent, not recognizing the social analysis of discourse entails going beyond this natural attitude towards language in order to reveal the precise mechanisms and modalities of the social and ideological work of language’; 2) a methodological reason ‘that texts constitute a major source of evidence for grounding claims about social structures, relations and processes’; 3) a historical reason that ‘texts are sensitive barometers of social processes, movement and diversity, and textual analysis can provide particularly good indicators of social change’; 4) and a political reason that ‘[i]t is increasingly through texts (...) that social control and social domination are exercised (and indeed negotiated and resisted)’ (Fairclough, 1995, pp. 208-209). In this way, Fairclough places too much emphasis on an approach to discourse analysis based on a critical epistemology. His ‘three-dimensional method of discourse analysis’ – ‘linguistic *description* of the language text, *interpretation* of the relationship between the (productive and interpretative) discursive processes and the text, and *explanation* of the relationship between the discursive processes and the social processes’ (Fairclough, 1995, p. 97) – are an interesting approach to the analysis of social and political relations, but it clashes significantly with the epistemological foundations of language in use approaches.

In line with my focus on Wittgenstein’s assumption that ‘language-games are rather set up as *objects of comparison* which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language by way not only of similarities, but also dissimilarities’ (Wittgenstein, 1953, §130), one of my goals is to present and compare language-games in which the language of ‘strategic partnership’ is

uttered as a way to learn the rules of the different games, compare them and try to understand better the complexity of the meanings of this term and the different kinds of relationship it grounds in international politics. Thus, my observations and analysis focus on the language present in the statements, discourses and documents, which, according to what I have discussed so far, constitute and sustain these strategic partnership relationships as they are. However, I do not want to simply observe the game as a way to identify its rules. I shall discuss the common ground where this language comes into being, why this exactly terminology is chosen and on which background ideas – e.g. friendship, pragmatic cooperation or distrust – the speech act of ‘strategic partnership’ is based.

Moreover, I intend to understand the balance of asymmetries within the different language games. I discuss the speaker and the hearer in the original speech act, if it is an assertive, directive, compromissive or another kind of speech act and which are the consequences of the different illocutionary forces present in each proposal of ‘strategic partnership’ for the kind of relationship it builds. I discuss if the proposed performative act, the illocutionary force, within the enunciation of this language is openly known by all the parties involved or some part of this content is implicated, what can lead me to consider the possibility of understanding the use of this language as a power projection mechanism through the use of a new and less negatively charged concept or even to construct more cooperative relationships in the international society.

In addition, since I want to observe how these language-games change in process, I will use the texts to compare the historical development of these relationships within specified time frames. I want to see how these relationships develop, but also how they are constantly reformulated through the enunciation of new language, new speech acts and the work of the illocutionary force. In that context, I want to observe if Fierke’s idea of ‘acting as if’ and modification of the rules of the game through the introduction of a new language makes also sense when I deal with the term ‘strategic partnership’. I benefit from the fact that the selected case studies are in fact relationships between international political actors, which have not been framed by the label ‘strategic partnership’ for an extensive period of time, what will make feasible the analysis of the process in a relatively short time-frame.

At this point, I should remark the reasons why the present approach does not fit into a framework of *Begriffsgeschichte*.<sup>7</sup> It is not the goal of this thesis to describe or re-construct the historical process of semantic development (synchronic and diachronic) of a concept. I assume

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<sup>7</sup> See Koselleck et al. (2006).

the capacity of concepts to have their semantic meanings changed, but the focus of my analysis is not on semantics and historical conceptualization but on the use of words for performative action. Language is therein used to provide an understanding of specific language-games in which a concept is employed as a speech act. The obstacle regarding this sort of project is then to try to connect it to an established method of linguistic analysis.

Language and discourse analysis face the challenge of not being able to rely on single methods: '[t]here is no single method for analysis and abstraction along these lines, but rather a number of ways that scholars can identify key aspects of significative practices and, based on their study, establish a discourse' (Milliken, 1999, p. 231). In this context, the above discussion on language, speech act theory and constructivist approaches was not only designed to delineate epistemological and ontological assumptions, but also to introduce notions, concepts and heuristic elements that will be used in this discussion of the concept of 'strategic partnership'. Thus the idea of language game, the categories of speech acts, the notions of common ground and implicature, the 'acting as if', the focus on processes, the relationship between language and power etc, are elements which frame how the analysis will be conducted in the empirical chapters. However, the analysis of each 'strategic partnership' will incorporate different methods of linguistic analysis. The main reference of all analyses will be speech act theory and the steps of locution, illocution and perlocution associated with each performative attempt, but other methods will also be used.

Milliken (1999) mentions two relevant methods of analysis: predicate and metaphorical analysis. 'Predicate analysis focuses on the language practices of prediction – the verbs, adverbs and adjectives that attach to nouns. Predications of a noun construct the thing(s) named as a particular sort of thing, with particular features and capacities. Among the objects constituted are also subjects, defined through being assigned capacities for and modes of acting and interacting' (Milliken, 1999, p. 232). The author argues that instead of or together with this method, metaphorical analysis can also be employed. She explains that this method 'focuses upon metaphors (...) as structuring possibilities for human reasoning and action. By means of an empirical study, the researcher establishes metaphors used regularly in the language practices of a group or society to make sense of the world (...). Abstracting from these particular metaphors, a theory of metaphorical categorization is then developed to account for particular metaphors as variations of a central model or models' (Milliken, 1999, p. 235).

In addition, an approach that is essential in my discussion on strategic partnerships comes from social psychology. Positioning theory has the advantage of being derived directly from speech act theory, assuring its compatibility to this language-based approach. Besides that,

it complements the analytical research framework of this thesis by means of a perspective that can enrich the assessment of how rules are constituted and changed in different contexts. This method will hence be discussed more thoroughly in the following paragraphs.

Harré and Langenhove (1999, p. 4) stated that:

‘[p]ositioning theory focuses on understanding how psychological phenomena are produced in discourse. Its starting point is the idea that the constant flow of everyday life in which we all take part, is fragmented through discourse into distinct episodes that constitute the basic elements of both our biographies and of the social world.’

In line with speech act theory and a language game-based ontology, positioning theory focuses on communicative situations and on the observation of the relational context in which the parties define their social standing in relation to the others. In order to understand the dynamics which constitute identities and agency one has to look at the ‘social episodes’ in which actors claim their positions in relation to the others, constituting both socially and psychologically their identities.

Harré and Langenhove argue that three elements that should be taken into consideration to understand the construction of psychic and social phenomena are: ‘[1]. the moral positions of the participants and the rights and duties they have to certain things, [2]. the conversational history and the sequence of things already being said, [3]. the actual sayings with their power to shape certain aspects of the social world’ (Harré and Langenhove, 1999, p. 6). Positioning theory completes then the language-based analytical framework of my thesis. It claims that social identities and the frames of social relationships are constituted in the discourse, through speech acts. Also, it stresses that an analysis should focus on how actors use language to position and re-position themselves and constitute and re-constitute their multiple ‘personas’ in the different environments of social interaction. Positioning theory opposes the belief in fixed and unitary identities. According to this perspective, the behavior of agents is conditioned to the conversational history it has with other actors, what makes them claim and refuse specific positions in each context. Instead of a singularity of self, positioning theory argues in favor of ‘a multiplicity of personas that are dependent upon the social context’ (Harré and Langenhove, 1999, p. 9).

An important assumption of positioning theory is how it distances itself from role theory. The analysis of social episodes does not aim at understanding a subject as an actor that incorporates different roles in each context but how through discourse actors position and reposition themselves and constitute their subjectivity:

‘[i]n role theory the person is always separable from the various roles they take up; any particular conversation is understood in terms of someone taking a certain role. The words that are spoken are to some extent dictated by the role and are to be interpreted in these terms. With positioning, the focus is on the way in which the discursive practices constitute the speakers and hearers in certain ways and yet

at the same time they are the resource through which speakers and hearers can negotiate their positions' (Davies and Harré, 1999, p. 52).

Thus it is through social interaction and by means of discursive practices that individuals/actors position themselves and emerge as such. Furthermore, it is from this positioning that 'a conversation unfolds through the joint action of all the participants as they make (or attempt to make) their own and each other's actions socially determinate' (Davies and Harré, 1999, p. 34). Harré and Langenhove (1999, p. 18) argue that to understand episodic structures one has to take into account the tri-polar structure of conversations: 'positions, storylines and relatively determinate speech acts.'

In this context, it is important that I address to some extent how position occurs, i.e. modes of positioning. Harré and Langenhove point out some binary categories of positioning and they start with the distinction between first and second order positioning: '[f]irst order positioning refers to the way persons locate themselves and others within an essentially moral space by using several categories and story lines. (...) second order positioning occurs when the first order positioning is not taken for granted by one of the persons involved in the discussion' (Harré and Langenhove, 1999, p. 20). They also mention other categories, e.g. performative and accountative positioning and self and other positioning, but the categorization that I would like to stress refers to tacit and intentional positioning. The authors argue that an individual not always positions him/herself or others in an intentional or conscious way. When the individual is not being 'Machiavellian', it is the case of tacit positioning, and if it is his/her goal to do so it is the case of intentional positioning. The latter is an important dimension of analysis of how international political actors position themselves in 'strategic partnerships'.

Harré and Langenhove (1999) identify four situations of intentional positioning: '[1] situations of deliberate self-positioning; [2] situations of forced self-positioning; [3] situations of deliberate positioning of others; and [4] situations of forced positioning of others' (Harré and Langenhove, 1999, p. 23). It is important to say that the authors argue that deliberate self-positioning 'occurs in every conversation where one wants to express his/her personal identity' (Harré and Langenhove, 1999, p. 23) and that 'forced self-positioning differs from deliberate self-positioning in that the initiative now lies with somebody else rather than the person involved' (Harré and Langenhove, 1999, p. 26). These categories of intentional positioning must be kept in mind in the analysis of the case studies that will be conducted in the third part of the thesis.

To sum up, positioning theory argues that the analyst must look at conversations and draw the deliberate and forced positioning of the participants from their use of language. Through the observation of different communicative situations, it can be observed how actors



position and reposition themselves and thus constitute their social subjectivity and the terms of their relationships with other participants. According to Davies and Harré (1999, p. 38) '[p]ositions are identified in part by extracting the autobiographical aspects of a conversation in which it becomes possible to find out how each conversant conceives of themselves and of the other participants by seeing what position they take up in what story, and how they are then positioned.' This work of extracting the autobiographical aspects of a conversation will be present in the analysis I will conduct on different communicative situations. This will help to shed some light on how differently 'strategic partnership' can be constituted. Lastly, it must be stressed, however, that through this sort of analysis situations can be identified in which 'two people can be living quite different narratives without realizing that they are doing so' (Davies and Harré, 1999, pp-47-48). That this kind of observation is possible according to positioning theory may only enrich my analysis of 'strategic partnership' in international politics. It must be taken into account, nevertheless, that, as stressed by Davies and Harré (1999, p. 52), any speech act may be interpreted in multiple and also opposing ways. It is therefore necessary to emphasize that despite this effort to point out the assumptions on which my analysis will be based my account does not aspire an acknowledgement of truth, but the recognition of a valid form of understanding 'strategic partnership' in international politics. In this context, some words are necessary on the issue of whose language I observe and analyze.

Traditional realist and neorealist approaches in International Relations considered the state as a unitary actor, a 'black box', which, by possessing fixed interests, should have one single external voice. However, since decades, this presumption has been growing weaker. Studies in the subarea of foreign policy analysis, for example, had already introduced analysis that tried to cope with the complexity of the multiple voices that can be found, mainly in democratic regimes, when the external affairs of international political actors are scrutinized. In that context, when analyzing the foreign affairs of a complex international political actor like the European Union or Russia in the first years after the end of the Soviet Union, it is an even more complex task to recognize the different actors that are playing the language-game. Hence, whereas I focus on statements, speeches and documents exchanged between foreign affairs ministries or state representatives and representatives of EU institutions, for example, what could be a concession to the unitary actor abstraction,<sup>8</sup> I also go further in analyzing each case. I shall observe and analyze the language of other actors within these international political actors, whose utterances can be considered significant in the context of constitution,

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<sup>8</sup> This 'concession' could be criticized if my intention were to present a deconstructionist approach, since it reinforces the legitimization of traditional political entities.

maintenance and reformulation of each ‘strategic partnership’ language-game. Thus, I may take into consideration, for example, how the voices of individual EU members are relevant to the bilateral relationship of the EU with individual strategic partners.

In light of my goal of understanding the use and the meaning of the term ‘strategic partnership’ through an approach based on the assumptions of a linguistic epistemology and on the performative character of language, I will not apply a positivist epistemology. Although I stress an empiricist approach on the use of language, the aim of this dissertation is not to isolate and define independent and dependent variables and try to find a causal link between them. My object of analysis are texts, oral or written, which, through observation, description and discussion, will allow me to identify actors and audiences in speech acts, processes of positioning and uses of language that may permit some understanding of ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics.

#### **1.4 Connecting the Assumptions and Goals of the Thesis**

In a collection of essays on the conceptual triad ‘identities, borders and orders’ Albert and Kratochwil (2001, p. 280) have stated that:

‘(...) what we are looking at are not distinct concepts standing for some immutable parts of reality, but rather relations between concepts and their changing patterns of meaning. Furthermore, precisely because we want to capture the changing nature of these interactions, we have to focus less on the stabilizations that these relationships sometimes achieve, i.e., their content, than on the *activities* that account for the changes and for which the temporary stabilizations are just limiting cases. To that extent the meaning of the terms is not given by the world “out there”, but rather by the mutual references these terms make to each other, by the processes of including and excluding something from the concepts, and by the resulting implications of these changing semantic fields. To that extent understanding these terms means not so much to clarify the referents as it implies to be able to go on with the social and political practices and, through reflection, make sense out of them.’

In my introduction to this dissertation I pointed out the object of this research. The goals of my thesis are deeply related to some ontological and epistemological assumptions, which I tried to clarify in this chapter. I emphasized my proposal of presenting an analysis of the ‘strategic partnership’ concept but without providing a fixed definition of its meaning, a single understanding of what it generates in terms of foreign policy relationships. I want to focus on the interactions that originate the development of this kind of relationship in a process, and in this regard, I propose an analysis based on language in use. By presenting some punctual discussions within the philosophical/linguistic debates on ordinary language, within constructivism and even social psychology, I hope I was able to establish the terms of my research.

My goal here was to ground how I will cope with a discussion on the origin of the concept of ‘strategic partnership’ in the discourse of international politics and its possibility of acquiring multiple meanings, defining varied forms of interaction in different relational contexts. Moreover, I aim to design a framework to assess the consequences of the use of this term for agency and structural constitution. In the next chapter I will be presenting some discussions made by authors identified with the so-called English School of International Relations, which will help me to further structure the approach to ‘strategic partnership’ presented in this thesis.

## 2 The English School and Language

The goal of the previous chapter was to explain the link between my research object and the approaches to language in use. I emphasized my goal of assessing the term ‘strategic partnership’ from a perspective of it being problematized, which makes it possible to understand the uses of this expression in current international politics without needing a single definition. By pointing out some discussions conducted in the research fields of Philosophy of Language, Pragmatics, International Relations and Social Psychology, I specified the basic ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions on which this thesis is based.

However, there is a group of questions that I wish to address in this research that reflect the two-level nature of my analysis. The first concerns the meanings associated with the term ‘strategic partnership’ on the level of interaction. In that regard, I will be focusing on the linguistic and relational processes of development of rules and delimitation of agency between the actors participating in the many games considered as ‘strategic partnership’. The second dimension concerns how the use of this language stands on the systemic level that transcends the level of interaction. One of the uses of ‘strategic partnership’ discussed in the thesis is its normative use, that is, the fact that this term can be an instrument deployed to promote normative change in the system. Thus, there is a micro and a macro dimension unfolding from my focus on language.

It should be said here that I will assess the systemic normative impact of the use of ‘strategic partnership’ by drawing from a specific set of assumptions, a specific vocabulary derived from the approaches of the so-called English School. I argue that the establishment of relationships defined by the expression ‘strategic partnership’ can be understood in one of its uses as a fundamental part of a normative strategy of the European Union to expand foundational values of the core of the European and global international societies. This is a point of departure for my analysis, and I presuppose that there is a European and a global international society constituted by specific actors sharing a group of common values. Therefore, I am aware of the fact that by drawing my research questions from a specific perspective I am tied to a determined epistemological and ontological framework and even contributing to the stabilization of its assumptions. Nevertheless, if I wish to tackle the use of ‘strategic partnership’ from a micro and a macro perspective, I need a systemic approach that allows me to deal with the normative use of the term, which is the research object of my thesis. This approach should not, however, clash with a ‘language in use’ approach. The English School provides me with some concepts, ideas and perspectives to arrive at a deeper

understanding of the use of ‘strategic partnership’. It enables a discussion on the interaction and systemic levels, while offering an account compatible with language in use approaches.

In the following I will introduce the main concepts and assumptions of the English School on which my approach to ‘strategic partnership’ is based. I will not be conducting a discussion of the origins and development of the so-called English School. However, I will present the main topics addressed by the authors identified with this theoretical group in IR, which I consider relevant in the context of the present thesis. The following section will discuss how an English School-based perspective can be associated with the language-based assumptions presented in the previous chapter and how it builds a cohesive approach to deal with ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics. In the last section I will elaborate further on how language and international society-based approaches are used to construct my main argument.

## 2.1 English School-based Assumptions

In *The Anarchical Society*, Hedley Bull (1995)<sup>9</sup> discussed how order is achieved on a systemic level. In a world, in which human communities are organized in sovereign polities, such entities interact but this contact is sustained and to some extent constrained by norms that transcend the unity level. There is a degree of world order that Bull understands as ‘those patterns or dispositions of human activity that sustain the elementary or primary goals of social life among mankind as a whole’ (1995, p. 19).

According to Bull, there are basic goals pursued by all societies: i.e. the protection of life from violence that may cause death or harm; the protection of promises and agreements; and the protection of property (1995, p. 4). Order is then achieved when there is some kind of normative framework that secures the achievement of these goals. From a domestic analogy, if it is assumed that there is a society of states that share these same basic goals, there must be some kind of normative framework that keeps order in the international society in spite of its assumed anarchic nature. Hence, the basic common goals or interests of the members of the society of states are grounded in a basic degree of value-sharing, which is also the basis of a complex structure of norms, institutions and rules that support the necessary degree of order for the fulfillment of these individual goals. This is the *rationale* behind Bull’s concept of ‘society of states’ or ‘international society’.

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<sup>9</sup> The first edition of the book was published in 1977.

In that context, the classic definitions of concepts of the ‘international system’ and ‘international society’ should be presented. According to Bull (1995, p. 9) there is an international system ‘when two or more states have sufficient contact between them, and have sufficient impact on one another’s decisions to cause them to behave – at least in some measure – as parts of a whole’ (Bull, 1995, p.9). In turn, making reference to a deeper relationship between state actors, the author argues that there is a society of states or international society ‘when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions. [...] recognizing certain common interests and perhaps some common values, they regard themselves as bound by certain rules in their dealings with one another, such as they should respect one another’s claims to independence, that they should honor agreements in which they enter, and that they should be subject to some limitation in exercising force against one another. At the same time they co-operate in the working of institutions such as the forms of procedures of international law, the machinery of diplomacy and general international organizations, and the customs and conventions of war’ (Bull, 1995, p. 13).

According to Bull, the ‘element of society’ has always been present in the modern international system, although its survival sometimes could be deemed precarious. The author argues that the modern international system reflects the presence of three elements that characterize ‘three traditions’ (Hobbesian – or Machiavellian, in Martin Wight’s first categorization –, Grotian and Kantian): ‘the element of war and struggle for power among states, the element of transnational solidarity and conflict, cutting across the divisions among states, and the element of co-operation and regulated intercourse among states’ (Bull, 1995, p. 39). According to Bull, although one of these elements may predominate over others in specific moments at specific geographical regions in the system, they are in a way always present in the international system. From this presumption comes the belief that the ‘element of international society’ has always been present in the international system and that the ‘idea’ of international society has a basis in reality. Although it sometimes looks weak, it is always present by exerting influence on the common interests of the units and on the common rules and institutions agreed by them (Bull, 1995, p. 40).

What can be gleaned from this first look into Bull’s basic ideas about the forms of engagement among the units in the international arena is that the author focuses on state actors, which are taken as actors that have basic fixed and fundamental goals or interests. However, what stands out is the role of the values in which the development of a normative framework is grounded. This normative framework is supposedly what sustains the institutions that enable cooperation, keeping order and allowing the unities in the system to reach their fundamental goals. Transcending the realist ontology of egoistic like-units, Bull’s approach stresses the relevance of values and norms in international relations, introducing a new ethical and moral

dimension to the debates of the discipline. Moreover, according to his account, the international society – despite being grounded in a basic level of value sharing derived from the norm of sovereignty – can operate with different degrees of value sharing and different degrees of solidarity among its members.

Bull (1995) establishes the difference between pluralist and solidarist conceptions of international society. Sukanami (2002) points out that from Bull's perspective, pluralism and solidarism are opposing 'judgments about solidarity or potential solidarity present in the existing international society' and according to his reading of this author Sukanami sustains that 'solidarism' refers to the current international society. Regarding the difference between the two notions, the author argues that:

'a "solidarist" sees a sufficient degree of solidarity or potential solidarity among states to make effective a system of international law that incorporates the distinction between legal and illegal reasons for war, a mechanism of law enforcement against those states that illegally resort to war, and the principle of the international protection of human rights. A "pluralist", correspondingly, is not necessarily or even primarily someone who is in principle opposed to these things. A pluralist considers it on balance unprofitable to try to incorporate them into international law given the present circumstances of international society marked by the lack of sufficient solidarity among states – unprofitable from the viewpoint of achieving the desired goals without sacrificing the minimum goal of orderly coexistence of states.' (Sukanami, 2002, pp. 13-14)

According to Linklater and Sukanami (2006, p.6), from a historical perspective, one can see how Bull's initial understanding of the opposition between pluralism and solidarism has developed in current debates. Initially in Bull (1995) this opposition referred to a judgment on the degree of solidarity present in international society that was capable of sustaining the incorporation of international law. However, the authors argue that nowadays pluralism and solidarism could be seen as 'two contrasting normative positions'. The pluralist perspective emphasizes the norm of sovereignty by defending a minimum set of norms that can sustain the international order without affecting the sovereign right of the state to preserve control from the outside in its internal jurisdiction. On the other hand, the solidarist perspective maintains that, given the necessity to protect international human rights, moral requirements necessitate the weakening of the sovereign capacity of state actors. Thus it is important to stress the strong contrast regarding the normative standpoint of both perspectives: whereas pluralism is attached to a focus on states, solidarism turns its focus on a bigger scope where individuals stand in the centre.

In my thesis I focus on Bull's original understanding, especially the idea of existing degrees of solidarity within the international society. And given my interest in this gradation, Buzan (2006) provides me with a better account for defining international societies in terms of

‘thin’ and ‘thick’ international societies than in terms of a normative opposition between pluralists and solidarists:

‘[i]f, as might be inferred from Bull's discussion of rules, and from some of Dunne's and Wheeler's writing about positive international law, solidarism is better understood as being about the thickness of norms, rules and institutions that states choose to create to manage their relations, then pluralism and solidarism which simply link positions on a spectrum and have no necessary contradiction’ (Buzan, 2006, p. 58).

Buzan understands a thick international society as a society ‘in which a wider range of values is shared, and where the rules will be not only about coexistence, but also about the pursuit of joint gains and the management of collective problems in a range of issue-areas’ (Buzan, 2006, 59). Moreover, he argues that international societies should be observed individually in a spectrum that ranges through *asocial*, *power political*, *coexistence*, *cooperative*, *convergence*, and *confederative* international societies. Therefore, Buzan (2006) discusses the possibility of initiatives that may result in the development of a higher degree of solidarity in the system:

‘[t]he will to move towards solidarist arrangements arises most easily if states become more internally alike, and therefore share a wider array of ideas and values (about human rights, or market economies or property rights, for example). In principle, solidarist international societies could generate a very wide array of shared norms, rules and institutions covering economy, law, politics, environment, education and so on. The EU is a living example of this potentiality’ (Buzan 2006, p. 121).

Buzan goes even further and calls attention to the type and number of shared values that could be associated with a change of position on the spectrum. According to the author, the abandonment of pluralism and a move towards the more solidarist side of the spectrum takes shape ‘when states not only recognize that they are alike in this sense, but see that a significant degree of similarity is valuable, and seek to reinforce the security and legitimacy of their own values by consciously linking with others who are like-minded, building a shared identity with them’. In this context, the author argues that the development of convergence is the beginning of the construction of an idea of community (Buzan, 2006, pp. 147-148). This is an argument from Buzan’s analysis of how Vincent solves the tension between pluralism and cosmopolitanism. According to Vincent’s *Human Rights and International Relations* (1986, pp. 150-152 apud. Buzan, 2006), the tension between a pluralist international society and a cosmopolitan world society could be solved through the development of an international society with a higher degree of solidarity. This would entail state actors becoming more alike and thus more capable to solve disagreements concerning the cases in which the moral obligation to protect human rights were sufficient to affect the principle of non-intervention. According to this rationale the spread of a global culture could be seen as the instrument capable of making



the international society ‘work more smoothly’ (Vincent, 1986, p. 151 apud. Buzan, 2006, p. 41).

In a nutshell, the move towards a thicker international society, or even towards the construction of a community, could be achieved not only through the strengthening of a growing number of values, but also through the consolidation of different types of values that may enable the construction of a common shared identity under some kind of global culture. By analyzing how the European Union has been developing its foreign approach, especially towards its so-called ‘strategic partners’, this rationale found in the English School is a useful theoretical framework to understand the construction of this foreign policy strategy. Before addressing this issue further in the next section, some other elements present in the English School framework should be pointed out.

In *The Evolution of International Society*, Watson (1999) conducts a historical discussion of ancient states and their systems. In line with Bull (1995), the author takes Christianity as the origin of an emerging European international society in the middle ages. In the nineteenth century this society could be recognized by its consolidated norms and fundamental institutions,<sup>10</sup> like diplomacy and balance of power. Despite the expansion of the boundaries of this international society by means of the European colonial conquests and the resulting imposition of European values in non-European societies, there was not yet a global international society. As stressed by Onuma (2000), the coexistence of other regional systems of world order, like the sinocentric tributary system, hindered the establishment of an all-encompassing international society. According to the author, the ‘Global international society came to exist as a result of the triumph of the imperial and colonial policies of the Western powers and the submission of non-Western peoples to them’ (Onuma, 2000, p. 64). As long as ‘Turkey, Japan, China and other African nations’ were not incorporated into the ‘Family of Nations’ the existence of a global international society could not be acknowledged. This process started to take place during the nineteenth century. As Onuma (2000) points out, in 1839 Britain sent expedition forces and defeated China imposing the Treaty of Nanking, through which ‘the Ch’ing dynasty came to be incorporated into the Eurocentric system of international law as far as its relations with the Western powers were concerned’ (Onuma, 2000, p. 30). After the Treaty of Paris (1856) the Sublime Porte was acknowledged as a Public Law subject entitled to participate in the European Concert and whose independence and territorial integrity had to be respected (Onuma, 2000, p. 35). Eventually,

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<sup>10</sup> This refers to Reus-Smit’s (1997) categorization, which will be mentioned later in this chapter.

‘a century after the Macartney mission, China accepted the regulation of interstate relations European international law not only with regard to Western nations, but with regard to Asian nations. Also by the end of nineteenth century, most of the African continent was partitioned by the European powers. Other continents such as America and Oceania had already been under the domination or hegemony by European powers. Thus, international law, which the European powers regarded to regulate international relationships among themselves, became the law of international society as we see today’ (Onuma, 2000, p. 30).

Hence, the birth of a global international society was the result of a process in which the European international society imposed itself upon other normative systems, becoming ‘the first open system to become universal in scope’ (Dunne, 2001, p. 68). This normative European preponderance, which created an international society with a global scope, certainly did not, however, create a homogeneous and solidary<sup>11</sup>/thick international society. This lack of solidarity persists today and characterizes a pluralist global international society.

It must be said that this global international society is a society of states. Thus regarding the membership criteria of this international society, it could be argued that sovereignty is the basic requirement. As stated above, however, the degree of value-sharing present in the system is not homogeneous. There are clearly state actors that find themselves more distant to the core due to an incomplete incorporation or disrespect for its basic norms. This creates a system in which regional or sub-global international societies coexist within the broader global international society.

Buzan (2006, p. 236) argues that ‘the most obvious candidate for sub-global international society is the West’ since it serves as the core of the global international society, enabling full compatibility between this sub-level and the global level. Moreover, the author argues that the West is not only a ‘thicker’ part of the global international society, it is the:

‘centre of power that supports the global interstate society, and the repository of the more contested institutions which that core projects into global interstate society and to some extent supports coercively (the market, human rights, democracy). In this sense, the West generally is still playing the role vanguard to global interstate society, pressing its own values and institutions onto societies that in varying degrees want to resist them, and which use the earlier round of pluralist institutions (especially sovereignty, territoriality, diplomacy) to do so.’ (Buzan, 2006, p. 237)

Thus Buzan acknowledges that there is a center and a periphery in the global international society, or as he puts: ‘yolks embedded in the global white’ (2006, p. 238). And this core wishes to project its values into the periphery, aiming at making the system turn thicker as a whole.

I will not be working with the concept of ‘West’, since this category does not represent a consistent and homogeneous core, given the different gradations of norm internalization that can be found inside it. In any case, I prefer to see the European international society as the

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<sup>11</sup> Meaning closer to the solidarist side of the spectrum.

original and ‘thickest’ part of this core. Aalto (2007, p. 467) sees this sub-global international society as covering geographically the ‘most of the greater European area stretching from Western Europe to Russia and the westernmost parts of the CIS’. The author points out ‘sovereignty, diplomacy and the market’ besides ‘equality of people and human rights, nationalism in the form of self-determination, popular sovereignty and democracy’ as the norms, institutions and values that are representative of this international society. In this respect, I would not say I agree with the geographical breadth of the European International Society as Aalto presents it, but I agree with the observation that an European international society has been constituted and that this concept has analytical value.

Also relevant in this regard is Buzan’s statement that this second-order pluralism (the existence of various ‘yolks’ in the global ‘white’) does not necessarily mean that there is a rival relationship between the many sub-global international societies. According to Buzan, the Cold War is a good example of strong rivalries that ranged ‘from friendship through indifference to hostility’ (2006, p. 236). In any case, it appears that the core pursues the homogenization of the system, and this helps explain why the core tries to implement issue-specific regimes or institutions that can support the global expansion and consolidation of its values.

Institutions are an essential element in the English School theorization, but there are different approaches to it. Buzan (2006), for example, develops the concept of ‘primary institutions’. These institutions are defined as ‘durable and recognised patterns of shared practices rooted in values held commonly by the members of interstate societies, and embodying a mix of norms, rules and principles’ which ‘may be extended to, and accepted by, non-state actors’. Moreover, the author states that ‘[i]n order to count as a primary institution, such practices must play a constitutive role in relation to both the pieces / players and the rules of the game. There is probably not<sup>12</sup> a useful distinction to be made between constitutive and regulatory (or fundamental and procedural) primary institution’ (2006, pp. 181-182).

In turn, Reus-Smit (1997) develops a perspective to address the idea of international society from a structure of layers, in which institutions also take part. According to the author, international societies are composed on their most basic level by constitutional structures, which are defined as ‘*coherent ensembles of intersubjective beliefs, principles, and norms that perform two functions in ordering international society: they define what constitutes a legitimate actor, entitled to all the rights and privileges of statehood; and they define the basic parameters of rightful state action*’<sup>13</sup> (Reus-Smit, 1997, p. 566). Thus Reus-Smit argues that

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<sup>12</sup> Word underlined in the original text.

<sup>13</sup> Italics in the original text.

this primary structural level in a society of states makes reference to a criterion of membership to this society and to the boundaries that limit the behavior of its members. Moreover, the author argues that these constitutional structures are formed by three ‘intersubjective normative elements: a hegemonic belief about the moral purpose of centralized, autonomous political organization; an organizing principle of sovereignty; and a norm of pure procedural justice’ (Reus-Smit, 1997, p. 566) According to Reus-Smit (1997), the former is the core of this constitutional structure, and is perceived as the foundation for the other two normative elements.

On a second level, Reus-Smit argues that the fundamental institutions of international societies can be identified as ‘*those elementary rules of practice that states formulate to solve the coordination and collaboration problems associated with coexistence under anarchy*’<sup>14</sup>. (Reus-Smit, 1997, p. 557). Thus, according to the author, to assume the existence of a constitutional structure based on sovereign units in an anarchical environment, the members of an international society will ‘face two basic types of cooperation problems: problems of collaboration, where they have to cooperate to achieve common interests; and problems of coordination, where collective action is needed to avoid particular outcomes’ (Reus-Smit, 1997, p. 557). As examples of fundamental institutions, the author cites ‘bilateralism, multilateralism, international law, diplomacy, and management by great powers’ (Reus-Smit, 1997, p. 558).

Lastly, on a third level, Reus-Smit points out that through the practices associated with the fundamental institutions, it is possible for the members of the international society to agree on issue-specific regimes, which ‘enact basic institutional practices in particular realms of interstate relation’ (Reus-Smit, 1997, p.558). In this sense, Reus-Smit presents a model of a hierarchical structure that explains how a political actor becomes a member of the international society and how its behavior in this environment is limited; the model also incorporates the instruments, which these members can implement to solve their cooperation and collaboration problems and then pursue their goals. These instruments are the institutions of international society.

It is then possible to see in Reus-Smit’s argument (as in Bull) the relevance given to the norm of sovereignty, which not only defines membership in the international society, but also – as an element of its constitutional structure – constitutes and regulates the international system from its more basic level, exerting influence on the forms of interactions and association developed by the units. Nevertheless, although sovereignty provides state-units with their

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

membership in the international society, there are clearly different degrees of sharing of the core values of the international society among state actors. This discrepancy has consequences not only to how the units establish their parameters of correct and legitimate behavior, but also to the limits of the forms of cooperation and association available to them. Consequently, this creates the possibilities of variation in the pluralist-solidarist spectrum of thin and thick international societies conceptualized by Buzan.

Returning to the discussion on institutions, it could be argued at first glance that Buzan's primary institutions are in a way a combination of Reus-Smit's constitutional structure and fundamental institutions. But Buzan goes further and comes up with the concept of 'master institutions' as well. He argues that some primary institutions 'nest inside the others', what should not mean 'that some are constitutive and others regulatory' (p. 195). The author is probably trying to address the fact that there are basic institutions and others that result from them, while denying the possible argument that these basic institutions have a constitutive nature and the ones that come from them have a regulative function. He is making an effort to cope with the undeniable ontological antecedence of some institutions, while opposing the idea of a functional differentiation in terms of constitutive and regulative functions. Therefore, although the institution of diplomacy derives from sovereignty, the author denies the understanding of diplomacy as a merely regulatory or procedural institution since it is also constitutive of the 'game of states'. I do not consider Buzan's categorization of institutions more favorable than Reus-Smit's. Yet it is important to stress both the constitutive and regulatory indissociable characteristics of institutions in the vocabulary of the English School,<sup>15</sup> but in a way Reus-Smit's more clear categorization is very useful and in my opinion easier to apprehend than the introduction of the idea of 'master institutions'. In any case, I focus on the difference between norms and institutions, in which norms are associated to the 'constitutional structure' and institutions to the 'foundational institutions'.

Moving the discussion onto a different topic, the 'game of states' is also a relevant point for this thesis. This notion is taken by Buzan from Manning's (1962) *The Nature of International Society* where the author argues that the international society is a game of 'let's-play-states'. Buzan's (2006, pp. 140-141) point of departure is Manning's discussion of problematizing the constitutive rules of this game of states – the author argues that the most basic rules are the norms of sovereignty, territoriality and diplomacy – and the possible variations of this game in a cross-reference to his spectrum of pluralist and solidarist

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<sup>15</sup> What is compatible with Onuf's (1989) argument that there is a mistake to try to differentiate constitutive and regulative functions of rules.

international societies. The authors ask if by seeking a more solidarist international society the game of states would not be overcome by other games like ‘empire’, ‘cosmopolitanism’ or ‘federation’.

In my opinion the game of states has already been overcome in its original state-centric form in the international society. Although it is still present, there are many games being played simultaneously within the global international society. And although these games can have different systemic impacts, they certainly have some influence on the constitution of the wider board. One of these games that can have significant systemic impact is the game of ‘strategic partnership’.

The last part of this section relates to the discussion on values. I am concerned with the correspondence between thin and thick international societies and the number and types of values shared. Buzan (2006, p. 139) argues that pluralism or thin international societies are associated with values and rules related to the idea of coexistence, while solidarism or thick international societies are the product of values and rules that transcend this idea of coexistence and maintenance of a minimum form of international order. Suganami (2002, p. 7) mentions Bull’s point that the maintenance of the international order goes beyond the recognition of the existence of rules: ‘[t]o be effective, rules must be communicated, administered, interpreted, enforced, legitimized, adapted and protected’. And this is in Bull’s opinion the role of the institutions of the international society.

As I mentioned above, institutions are used as an instrument to cope with cooperation (collaboration and coordination) problems that threaten the international order. My point is that the core of the global international society – those that integrate the European international society – wants to communicate, enforce, legitimize and protect the norms and rules that hold the system together. Moreover, besides sustaining this international order, the core aims to consolidate it. It seeks a resilient international order. In order to lead the system towards a more stable configuration, the core has to reinforce, legitimize and expand these values that define the core itself but that are not completely internalized in the periphery of the international society. In this context, I see some ‘strategic partnerships’ as part of the strategy of the core to promote convergence in the global international society. This could be seen both as a self-interested and a moral-based goal. In any case, it is a strategy that is based on the element of values, and its relevance will be demonstrated when I later discuss how the expression ‘strategic partnership’ has been integrated into the vocabulary of international politics.

## 2.2 Connecting Language in use with International Society

The next step is a discussion of how to combine language-based assumptions and the ideas of the English School in a coherent approach to deal with 'strategic partnership'. In this context, I will concentrate on how the ontology, epistemology and methodology of language and international approaches fit together.

The English School is certainly tied to a commitment to objectivism. The authors who are considered part of this tradition in International Relations theory assume their position as objective observers trying to understand the mechanisms through which political communities – mainly states – interact to deal with conflicts of interests and to find solutions to common problems while keeping some degree of order encompassing all its members. Whereas many attempts to destabilize and deconstruct foundations are implemented in the context of the post-positivist debate, the English School goes in the opposite direction, stressing the role of norms and values as foundations of the international order.

The authors of the English School aim at providing a picture of the international realm capable of giving some kind of explanation about how action is conducted in international politics. In their endeavor, they unfortunately ignore the subjective bias of the analyst and are to some extent vulnerable to criticism regarding a Eurocentric bias. Nevertheless, the English School cannot be accused by reflexivists of providing a version of hard positivism. Wæver (1998), for example, mentions the accusations that the English School is not 'precise' or 'scientific' enough. I agree with this assessment. The English School provides an account to explain international reality and identifies patterns as well as independent and dependent variables regarding how norms and values sustain the international order – but there is no great preoccupation with falseability. On the other hand, the introduction of a focus on ideational and normative elements and of a moral and ethical dimension in international politics – while not denying the relevance of material capabilities and actor rationality – makes the English School a good candidate for implementing a dialogue with non-positivist approaches.

Although the authors traditionally identified with the English School seem to be negligent in regard to the separation between subject and object, the English School incorporates the element of intersubjectivity. Shared values and the idea of a moral responsibility towards the other members of the international society influence and constrain the behavior of actors that seek to reach individual goals, but are not necessarily egoistic. In this sense, a relationship between international political actors is not limited by a pre-established and fixed egoistic nature. The degree of internalization of norms and of value sharing between the actors involved may influence the priorities and consequently the behavior of the units

interacting in the system. Hence, one remarkable element present in an international society-based research framework is the possibility to cope not only with enmity and rivalry in international politics but also with cooperation and friendship. Consequently, one of the most interesting features of the international society approaches is how it relates to fixity and change.

Another feature that stands out in the English School is how its authors approach the norm of sovereignty. The role of the sovereign state is fundamental in the perspective of the English School. As I previously mentioned, the norm of sovereignty belongs to the 'constitutional structure' of international society and is a condition of membership, being the most basic constitutive rule of the 'game of states'. But this state-centrism does not exclude the participation of other actors. Individuals are certainly relevant actors in an idealized 'world society' but even in international societies the higher the degree of solidarism or 'thickness' the more relevant are non-state actors on the international board. Despite this focus on state-actors, the English School is certainly not incompatible to a language in use approach.

Neither in Wittgenstein nor in other pragmatists is there a goal of deconstructing the actors that participate in a language-game or any communicative situation. Although the language enunciated has the ability to establish or constitute the actors that belong to a specific linguistic context, the focus lays on the semantic sphere, on the meaning of the enunciations in each specific context. In the same way as linguistic analysts identify the interlocutors in a communicative situation, the English School scholars consider states to be the actors of reference in games of international politics. The fact that I am working inside the framework of the English School does not force me to be as state-centric as conventions would demand. More significant than the importance given to states is the fact that I aim to identify the relevant interlocutors of the games I analyze. However, I will be dealing with 'strategic partnership' games, and in this context I cannot ignore the role of state-actors as interlocutors and I am certainly identifying their enunciations as the language which I take as the object of my analysis. I argue that states will always be present in my analysis, since they are the main actors that participate in 'strategic partnerships'. However, that does not mean that I will deny the relevance of 'voices' of non-state actors for the construction of these 'language-games'.

Another element that brings language in use approaches and the English School together is the relevance of looking at the role of 'intersubjectivity' on the level of interaction. In approaches based on language-games or linguistic interactions the understanding of meaning is related to an analysis of the shared ideas, meanings and knowledge. In the context of the English School framework, intersubjectivity is also what defines the status of each unity in the system, how the units behave, and how the system operates.



Hence, the existence of different degrees of value sharing is what makes the international society not only an arena of competition, but also one of cooperation and friendship. Pluralism and solidarism, or thinness and thickness, are a spectrum of possibilities that constrain the agency of international actors according to normative considerations. That creates the possibility of considering international politics as more than a locus of rivalry and enmity. Following Wittgenstein, 'the meaning of a word is its use in language'. The pluralist-solidarist spectrum also envisages the possibility of multiple forms of political arrangement. In that sense, both language-in-use approaches and the English School argue that the context must be observed in order for an understanding of the rules, which constitute meaning and define possibilities of agency, to be apprehended. This understanding can be altered in another moment though, since change is always a possibility. Hence, the acknowledgement of the possibility of change is another element that brings language and international societies close together.

Another topic that concerns the compatibility of both approaches regarding change is the possible relationship between 'language-games' and the 'game of state'. As I discussed before, a language-game is a communicative interaction in which the participants are constrained by rules of grammar but meaning is not pre-established. Although the actors involved are aware of previous meanings associated with specific words, meaning is not fixed and is developed as the game is played. Moreover, according to Wittgenstein, some language-games and the meanings related to them lose importance while others become more important, thus generating a gradual change in the vocabulary of a language and in the meanings of this vocabulary. Hence, language is a form of action and language-games must be observed for meaning to be apprehended. By understanding the meanings of the terms and the sentences that form a communicative relationship, one can see how the relationship between the interlocutors is developed, and how they behave in given situations and which rules structure interaction. But more than an instrument that communicates the operation of rules and the interaction that provides meaning, language defines those immersed in a linguistic context, constitutes the set of possible situations imagined by these actors and constrains the possibilities of reaction in a given situation. To this effect, language is the fluid origin, the ever-changing element that constitutes the social reality.

Speech act theory develops this assumption further. It focuses on the element of intentionality. A conscious actor, aware of the context in which he or she is situated and with whom he or she is interacting, can manipulate language, act through it and make his or her interlocutor act accordingly. By having the possibility to influence the responses of his interlocutor and change his or her pattern of behavior, he or she can either keep the status quo

or promote change. Moreover, by recognizing specific statements – for example by making the interlocutor adopt a specific desired behavior or agreeing on specific commitments – speech acts also set the boundaries to the possibilities of behavior for the actors involved. Thus, speech acts are the language-based communicative foundation of social constitutive rules.

Language is not a considered factor in the way the ‘game of states’ is positioned within the English School framework. But language is not incompatible to the game of states. I would even argue that it is a theoretical element that could improve the English School approach to international politics. The approaches to international society focus on states as the main actors on the board of the international politics game. They are taken as unitary actors that share the common basic interests associated with the maintenance of a working society but that also have certainly an agenda of their own to pursue. In this context, material, normative and intersubjective elements combine to sustain a framework in which both conflict and cooperation are possible but regulated by rules that are to some extent shared by all the states in the system. Clearly, the thicker the international society, the less problematic the nature of the clashes between the actors and the more developed the institutional framework capable of solving any conflict of interests that may come up. This is a process explained by English scholars without the introduction of language, but I argue that language can be introduced in this *rationale* and improve its analytical capacity.

The English School incorporates ideational elements into its framework but its narrative is based on a strict understanding of ‘practices’. It focuses on the actions of state actors that share a set of core values and manage to project and internalize these values to some degree in the whole system. In this context, the more these values are internalized by the members of the international society the less important are the material capabilities of the actors involved for the process of diffusion of these values. However, independently of the point on which the international society finds itself in the spectrum of thinness and thickness, language is always an element present in the interaction among the members of the system. For example, the constitutional norm of sovereignty is sustained by a discourse about the monopoly of violence and control in a given territory. It is a norm that was enunciated and communicated and internalized throughout the system, constituting the system itself. By the same logic, fundamental institutions like diplomacy and multilateralism or issue-specific regimes like a non-proliferation treaty come into being, are communicated, discussed and accepted by an audience through linguistic interactions and the implementation of communicative strategies. I should point out that I am not neglecting the role of power and material capabilities, I am in

fact emphasizing the role of language as the means through which material capabilities are mobilized and acquire its social meaning.

In the last chapter I mentioned Lasswell's (1965) belief that language is an important and efficient instrument in power maximizing strategies. But as I tried to underline in the last chapter, language is more than an instrument, it is the means used by actors to make sense of the world and constitute social reality. Language constitutes the rules by means of which the material capabilities of actors acquire their social and political purpose. My point is that the English School focuses on the role of norms as a constitutive framework of the locus of interaction of political units but does not address the communicative interaction that constitutes this basic normative framework, sustains it and may even change it. I maintain that language-based approaches can complement the English School by stressing the role of language not only for the constitution of these norms, but also for its consolidation in the system and even for eventual changes deemed necessary.

In this regard, it could be argued that language relates to the English School through Fierke's (2007) 'acting as if'. As I outlined in the previous chapter, this strategy works through the politicking of the rules of the game been played as a way to flaunt them while initiating a new set of rules of a parallel marginal game. The idea is not to try to overcome a problematic set of rules at once, but to gradually introduce the language that can sustain a new set of rules and wait until this discourse is legitimized and accepted to a sufficient degree to sustain the promotion of changes in practices that may consolidate the new game.

The intersecting point between this language-based argument and the English School framework is the focus on process and the possibility to change the rules that constitute and regulate the 'game of states'. As I have already stated, change within international societies is possible due to the constitutive dynamics of the international society that permit the relationship between its members to oscillate between cooperation and conflict. Bull narrates (1995), however, the history of the development of the global international society as a story of a more scope-limited European international society that managed to expand all over the international system, overcome the idea of mere coexistence in its core, and seek for more convergence beyond this normative centre, demonstrating a tendency of the international society to evolve into a more solidarist or thicker society.

In this context, I argue that the English School's strong historical perspective is another sign of its compatibility with language-based accounts. After having analyzed the work of Bull and other English scholars, Linklater and Suganami (2006) argue that it is difficult to know exactly what is the position of these writers about the place of history in International Relations

other than that it is important (Linklater and Suganami, 2006, pp. 89-90). In fact, I agree with this evaluation that the English School does not address clearly the exact role of history in IR epistemology. But the relevance given by English School writers to history in the construction of their arguments confirms its importance from an epistemological and methodological point of view.

In reference texts such as Bull's *The Anarchical Society* and Watson's *The Evolution of International Society* history is a fundamental epistemological and methodological element inside the English School framework. Watson (1999) observes history to understand how systems of states function, how the international society comes into being and how it will probably be evolving. Bull (1995) also emphasizes the idea of looking at the historical process – unfortunately from a Eurocentric point of view – and stresses how the values associated to Christianity and the norm of sovereignty create the foundations of the international society. In this regard, it is important to notice that Bull's categorization of 'system of states', 'international society' and 'world society' suggests the existence of a conceptual and practical teleological hierarchy.

Linklater and Suganami (2006, p. 92) quote an illustrative passage from the *The Anarchical Society* in which Bull addresses the complicated relationship of the English School with history: 'history does not enable us to predict the future, but it is indispensable in our speculations about our future options; still, our speculations may be misguided precisely because they are historically based'. In any case, what can be taken from this discussion is that the English School, like the approaches to language in use, focuses on processes. As I demonstrated in Chapter 1, Wittgenstein states that we should emphasize a descriptive methodology. According to the author language-games must be observed and the different games must be considered objects of comparison. In this context, the vocabulary employed in each specific language-game should be analyzed and that would enable an assessment of meaning. Likewise, other accounts from pragmatics mentioned previously are approaches based on the observation of processes or episodes as a means to deal with the meaning of the language used. Moreover, as I pointed out when I presented the concept of 'common ground', a look at processes of interaction with a focus on its historical development is necessary if the analyst aims at having access to the shared common understandings of the interlocutors that influence the use of language in a particular communicative situation. Lastly, the relevance of a focus on processes and history within Fierke's constructivist approach should be underscored again.

Therefore, it can be argued that an approach that tries to merge the contributions of language in use, the English School and even language-informed constructivism would not be essentially inconsistent. Each of these contributions focuses fundamentally on different research questions and stands on a different place in the production of philosophical, sociological and political knowledge. However, I argue that they can be merged in a way to address the concept of ‘strategic partnership’ in its full scope. By creating an approach that incorporates both the ‘language in use’ and the ‘international society’ accounts, I frame my object of study within an approach to international politics that incorporates both material and ideational elements and is compatible with a focus on processes and change. In addition, I complement this perspective on international politics with a linguistic approach that gives me the possibility to cope with interaction from a perspective centered on meaning and the constitutive nature of language.

### **2.3 Strategic Partnerships and the Structural Level of Analysis**

In the introduction to this thesis I presented the term ‘strategic partnership’ as the main object of analysis. In this context, I propose a focus on language in use that might enable an assessment of this term from an analytical framework based on the claim that language has constitutive and regulative implications for the possibilities of agency in international politics. In addition, I argue that these constitutive and regulative implications transcend the level of interaction between strategic partners. According to this, all forms of international political association are developed within a broader structure and the micro and macro levels have a co-constitutive relationship.

Hence, I cannot develop a discussion about forms of interaction in the international realm without taking into consideration the structural dimension in which these forms of association are embedded. By the same logic, I cannot try to provide a complete assessment of ‘strategic partnership’ as a foreign policy concept in the vocabulary of international political actors without making reference to its place in the structure where agents interact. If my focus is on the uses of ‘strategic partnership, I shall look into the different functions associated with this term on the level of interaction. Additionally, I must discuss its functions on a broader structural level.

Hence, the goal of the present chapter was to merge both language-in-use approaches and the English School of International Relations into a coherent approach to ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics. Whereas the linguistic approaches enable an assessment

of the micro-level of interaction, the English School is taken not only as a frame of reference for my analysis of language, but also as an instrument to complement my analysis of meaning in use and connect it to the disciplinary debate of International Relations theory. Hence, by leaning on both theoretical frameworks I conduct a two-level approach to cope with the role of 'strategic partnership' in current international politics.

The biggest challenge in pursuing this goal is to come up with a consistent structural approach to international politics that does not clash with the more fundamental language-based approaches exposed in the last chapter. That is the reason why I turned to the English School of international relations, especially to its discussions on the concept of 'international society'.

The theoretical framework in which the idea of 'international society' is conceptualized permits an analysis of the structural level on which the relationships among international political actors are put into practice, without compromising my commitment to a focus on processes and change. It is a framework that foresees the development of intersubjective feelings between the self and the other. Moreover, the spectrum of solidarity theorizes the co-existence of ideas of enmity, rivalry, cooperation and friendship. Thus it enables an analysis of 'strategic partnership' with reference to these ideas, and shows compatibility with my assumption about the multiple forms of association that can be defined by means of the use of this term.

By working with the idea of 'international society' I am also able to connect the rules that constitute and regulate language-games to the norms that constitute and regulate the 'game of states' in international politics. The rules developed and sustained by means of language within the specific language-games cannot be disconnected to the set of systemic constitutional norms on which the global international society is based. In addition, other norms, institutions and regimes are also sustained and can be changed by the work of language enunciated on the interaction level. In this context, an approach that relies on language-in-use and on the idea of 'international society' is necessary to cope with this co-constitutive relationship.

Besides that, another relevant element in my argument that depends on a discussion of the concept of 'international society' concerns the theoretical division of the members of the 'society of states' in terms of core and periphery. According to the English School framework presented in this chapter, the more non-core members of the international society incorporate the norms that are strongly internalized in the core and become internally more alike to its members, the higher the degree of shared values in the global international society. Thus it could be argued that the members of the core of this international society tend to share the common goal of overcoming a set of norms that sustain the international society in terms of

mere coexistence and act normatively towards the strengthening of convergence in the system. And it is in this context that I am reminded of Lasswell's (1965) perspective on language and speech act theory. According to Lasswell, language can be seen as a means to act politically and implement normative strategies.

Pointing to an argument that I will further develop in the following chapters, I argue in this regard that the 'strategic partnerships' established by the European Union with key state-actors need to be observed in relation to their functions within the 'game of states' and from the perspective of the core of the global international society. Within the foreign policy strategy of the EU, these political engagements belong to a normative strategy that coincides with the expected behavior of the core as theorized by the English School. By engaging in relationships labeled as 'strategic partnership' with a group of key state-actors, the EU conducts a strategy aiming at projecting its core values and promoting internal changes in these partners to make them more similar to European political systems. Moreover, by implementing this strategy and spreading the reach of these values all over the system, the degree of solidarity in the system should theoretically increase, making the global international society thicker and allowing its members to solve their collaboration and coordination problems more easily.

In addition to that, I argue that the differences in the constitutive framework among the 'strategic partnerships' held by the European Union are related to the status of these partners or to their position on the board of the global international society. By this logic, the different hierarchical positions occupied by the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) in comparison to the core of the global international society in terms of internalization of core norms, reflect the different set of specific rules that constitute its relationship of strategic partnership with the European Union. Hence, by observing the different forms of bilateral engagement that are established by 'strategic partnership', I argue that there is a co-constitutive relationship between their constitutive settings and the degree of solidarity in the global international society.

The discussions conducted in both the current and previous chapter aimed at presenting and discussing the main assumptions on which my analysis is based. By focusing in this chapter on the English School of International Relations, my goal was to explain the structural dimension of my approach which will allow me to discuss some important points regarding the concept of 'strategic partnership' in international politics: the ideas/values shared by international political actors on which 'strategic partnerships' are based; the contexts in which the 'strategic partnership' concept becomes a more legitimate terminology than others concepts like 'partnership' and 'special relationship'; the relationship between the degree of solidarity in

the global international society and the types of cooperative frameworks established through the notion of 'strategic partnership'; and the normative function of 'strategic partnership'. After having clarified these basic assumptions, and discussed how the argument was constructed and indicated how it is going to be approached, my next step will be to conduct a discussion of the origin and meanings of 'strategic partnership' in the vocabulary of international politics.



## Part II

# A New Concept in the Language of International Politics

### 3 Strategic Partnerships in International Politics

In my introduction I argued that the use of ‘strategic partnership’ as an expression that defines relationships between international political actors is a recent and meaningful phenomenon in current international politics. I also underscored that the combined use of these two words has enabled the consolidation of a new concept in the vocabulary of international politics. A problematization of this phenomenon is necessary. In this context, the first question to be addressed concerns the reasons why this term is becoming more relevant in the vocabulary of international politics. Furthermore, it is essential to discuss the specific goals and functions associated with this term and the kinds of relationships that can be framed by the notion of ‘strategic partnership’.

Felix Peña (2010a) argues that the new realities of power distribution in the international system are behind the establishment of new forms of policy-making in the international realm. Thus modalities of cooperation characterized by a lower degree of formalization and institutionalization like the ‘G groups’ or the BRICS could be seen as a reflection of the current scenario, in which developing countries try to carve out more power in the system, new dimensions of cooperation – e.g. south-south initiatives – are being expanded and multilateralism is allegedly becoming the principle behind the foreign policy of most states.

‘Strategic partnerships’ are not necessarily informal and deinstitutionalized relationships but are a by-product of this scenario. Since the 1990s old cooperative relationships have been re-invigorated and new ones have been framed as ‘strategic partnership’. However, there is no correspondence between the clarity of this term and its growing use in international politics. The expression is normally considered self-explicative and conceptual precision is ignored by those who use it. The rationale is that ‘strategic’ is something conducted with the aim at reaching goals considered vital and thus a ‘strategic partnership’ could generally be understood as a cooperative relationship between parties that share the desire to reach common high-priority goals. Unfortunately, simple empirical observation of some cases shows that the answer is not that simple. ‘Strategic partnership’ is the new joker of international politics. It is used to define relationships as complex, like the one between India and the EU, and straightforward commodity-based ones as the existent between Argentina and China. Moreover, the privileged status of strategic partner, which many countries try to obtain by means of a closer relationship with strong global players is evidence that the use of this expression transcends the simple intensification of cooperation between the parties or even the reconfiguration of the rules that sustain their relationship. It acquires a systemic function.

In this chapter I initiate a discussion on the uses of ‘strategic partnership’. Policy analysts have unfortunately neglected this discussion, but it is of extreme importance to understand the implications of the use of this term. I argue that there are many functions associated with the enunciation of ‘strategic partnership’ in the context of international politics, but one neglected use of this expression concerns its function as a language used to advance a value-based foreign policy. This is, in fact, based on the expectation of pragmatic cooperation without conditionality. It will be argued that ‘strategic partnership’ is a speech act that enables a ‘pragmatic move’ through which one actor tries to re-constitute the terms of its relationship with a specific partner. But before this conclusion is reached, there are some preliminary discussions that have to be conducted. First of all, the origin of this expression should be addressed. Next, I make some considerations regarding a definition of this term and the possible basic constitutive elements of a strategic partnership. In this regard, it is relevant to compare this expression with other terms normally used to define cooperative relationships between international political actors. Finally, a discussion on the role of shared-values in the constitution of a ‘strategic partnership’ is necessary.

### **3.1 The Introduction of ‘Strategic Partnership’ in the Vocabulary of International Politics**

‘Strategic partnership’ has been recently introduced in the vocabulary of international politics. Whereas ‘partnerships’, ‘alliances’ and ‘special relationships’ are older terms used to define relationships between international political actors, ‘strategic partnership’ emerged as a valid expression in international politics in the 1990s.<sup>16</sup>

The *British National Corpus* provides a significant collection of texts in English from 1980 to 1993 and the possibility to look at the use of expressions in the given time frame. The use of the searched expressions can be observed in a context, since a quotation of the original text (of newspapers, books, magazines or academic journals) is presented. I conducted a search in this corpus and found 6 entries for the expression ‘strategic partnership’ in the period from 1980 to 1993, but in none of these cases this expression was used in an IP context.<sup>17</sup>

The *Corpus of Historical American English*, as the *British National Corpus*, provides a significant collection of texts in English (in this case in American English) but in a longer time

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<sup>16</sup> The use of ‘partnership’ outside the vocabulary of international politics is much older. In 1890, in a legal/economic context, for example, it comes into force in England ‘The Partnership Act’ according to which a ‘partnership’ can be understood as ‘the relation which subsists between persons carrying on a business in common with a view of profit’ (Pollock, 1900, p. 1).

<sup>17</sup> I consider an IP (international politics) context diplomatic relations involving states, texts from journals that analyze foreign policy and articles from magazines and newspapers articles that address foreign policy matters.

frame from the 1810s to the 2000s. In this very long period the search found 11 entries for the expression ‘strategic partnership’. One entry could be found in the 1890s, but again not in an IP context. In the 1990s, 5 entries could be found, and all related to the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and some of its partners. The first entry, from 1992, makes reference to the US–Turkey strategic partnership. Finally, in the 2000s, 5 entries in an IR context could also be found<sup>18</sup>.

The *Corpus of Contemporary American English* allowed for a search for uses of the expression ‘strategic partnership’ in a significant database of texts from 1990 to 2010. In the period 1990–1994 only 1 entry related to international politics could be found. In the period 1995–1999, 29 entries that relate to international politics were found. Many of them related to the US-China relations during the Clinton administration. In the period 2000–2004, the expression ‘strategic partnership’ was found 33 times in an IP context and in the period 2005–2010, 45 entries were found.

The analysis of these *corpora* does not exclude the possibility that ‘strategic partnership’ could have been used between international political actors before the beginning of the 1990s. It suggests, however, that there has been a more frequent use of this expression in the vocabulary of international politics as of the 1990s. It also supports the argument that the use of this term in international politics is becoming more widespread.

However, some important questions remain. Firstly, why is this expression becoming more relevant in international politics? Secondly, what does it actually mean? Thirdly, why do other terms like ‘cooperation’ and ‘partnership’ not suffice anymore? Fourthly, does it bring something new to the board of the international politics game or is it just a new way to say the same and operate interest-based power politics?

Just a few authors working on EU-Russia relations dedicated some time to address the use of ‘strategic partnership’ in the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. This changed in the last few years. Some authors – probably because of its growing relevance in the vocabulary of EU’s foreign policy – started to acknowledge that this expression has become more usual in the vocabulary of international politics and that interestingly there is a lack of clarity regarding its meaning. Grevi (2010, p. 2), for example, states that ‘[s]trategic partnerships are a political category that no EU document or statement clearly defines’.

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<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, one of these entries is a quote from the article ‘Russian-Iraqi Relations: a historical and political analysis’ (*Arab Studies Quarterly*, 23:4, Fall 2001, p. 87) where the author argues that in the 1980s Soviet-Iraqi cooperation was officially called a ‘strategic partnership’. Although according to this text the use of the ‘strategic partnership’ concept could already be found in the 1980s that does not prove my argument wrong that this concept was consolidated in IR vocabulary as from the 1990s.

Khandekar (2011) also says that ‘[t]he notion of an ‘EU strategic partnership’ has yet to be defined by the European Union itself in any official document and years of debate have not yet managed to unravel why a group of ten lucky countries<sup>19</sup> (...) are clustered together under the ‘strategic’ banner.’ Peña (2010b), moreover, argues that ‘sometimes concepts with a strong mediational appeal but hard to define are used. One of these is “strategic partnership”’.<sup>20</sup> The author points out that the concept is commonly used among companies and also in the area of security, but in the international economic relationships its range is less understood, arguing that the use of the expression is probably more an instrument used to bring attention to high political meetings than to implement effective substantial agreements.

The lack of a definition and precision regarding this term would not be of great concern if it did not have important implications. This problem is clearly evident when, for example, one of the most important global players – the EU – makes it a principle of its foreign policy, since it uses this term to define its relationship with other major global players.

India, Russia, Brazil, China, Canada, Mexico are some of the states with which the European Union has been officially conducting a relationship of ‘strategic partnership’. In *A Secure Europe in a better world: European Security Strategy* (2003), the European Council emphasized the relevance of developing strategic partnerships for the security of the European Union: ‘there are few if any problems we can deal with on our own. The threats described above are common threats, shared with all our closest partners. International cooperation is a necessity. We need to pursue our objectives both through multilateral cooperation in international organizations and through partnerships with key actors.’ Moreover, it is stated in the document that ‘[i]n particular we should look to develop strategic partnerships, with Japan, China, Canada and India as well as with all those who share our goals and values, and are prepared to act in their support.’

In this quotation from the *European Security Strategy* (2003) all ‘key actors’ who are relevant for the EU’s security and/or share goals and values with the Union are its potential strategic partners. The text also suggests that these strategic partnerships are a means of strengthening international cooperation. However, it is a very imprecise declaration since it does not point out which values and goals should be shared with the strategic partners. It does not explain how countries like China or Mexico qualify to the same status as partners within the hierarchy of partners of the EU – to what extent are they all key actors, are they relevant to EU’s security and do they share values and goals with EU? And it is also not clear how it

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<sup>19</sup> A discussion on the EU’s strategic partners will be conducted in the next chapter.

<sup>20</sup> Free translation from Spanish.

provides a clear-cut differentiation between ‘strategic partnership’ as a new form of cooperation and other forms of cooperative relationship. Moreover, it is interesting to observe that the EU’s most important partner, the US, is not always put into this category. Whereas the report *Strategic Partners* (2010), presented to the European Council, presents the US as a strategic partner of the EU, most diplomatic statements and declarations from both sides do not use this term, which demonstrates the differentiated status of this bilateral relationship due to its allegedly incomparable relevance. In turn, according to Haukkala (2010, p. 134) Russia opted out of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and demanded the more privileged status of strategic partner.

Despite the lack of a definition, this suggests that the EU’s use of the expression ‘strategic partnership’ shows that this term is not simply randomly used. It is actually a cautious choice, one which differentiates the relationships defined as ‘strategic partnership’ from others defined for example in terms of ‘cooperation’, simple ‘partnership’, or ‘special relationship’. Although the thematic areas covered by so-called strategic partnerships are in general the same as the areas covered in relations defined by other terms – e.g. energy, security, trade and investment, scientific research – there are normative interests behind this differentiation and maybe also behind this lack of precision. In this context, one starts to wonder how ‘strategic partnership’ should be understood when it is employed by international political actors and if there would be a way to define it.

Lessa (2010) argues that ‘strategic partnership’ is a concept that has a clear definition. The author discusses the use of this expression in the context of the Brazilian foreign policy and he argues that ‘strategic partnerships’ are ‘priority political and economic relations, reciprocally compensating, established on the basis of an accumulation of bilateral relations of a universal nature (Lessa, 1998)’ (Lessa, 2010, p. 119). The author states that ‘[t]he idea of “strategic partnerships” obtained an unequivocal meaning in Brazil’s international experience in the 1970s and 1980s. It allegedly arose as a category of Brazilian diplomatic thinking in the context of the rapid change in relations with the United States during President Geisel’s administration (1974-1979)’ and was ‘conceived as an escape valve for the tensions from bilateral relations with the United States’ (Lessa, 2010, pp. 118-119). Hence, Lessa (2010) argues that this concept ‘established itself in Brazilian diplomatic thinking with a definitive meaning’ and that a ‘vulgarization’ of its use can be observed in the Brazilian diplomatic discourse as of the 2000s (Lessa, 2010, p. 119), caused by a ‘loss of meaning and importance of the concept as it was established by Brazil’s international experience’ (Lessa, 2010, p. 120). Moreover, the author argues that the concept ceased ‘to be an expression of a bilaterally defined

agenda around political convergence and economic projects and becomes a mere label' (Lessa, 2010, p. 120).

The first problem with Lessa's line of argumentation is when he argues that Brazil has been implementing 'strategic partnerships' since the 1970s. Here he is assuming that the old cooperation agreements of the past were exactly the same 'strategic partnerships' that we observe today. Actually the terminology used at that moment was not 'strategic partnership'. By looking at the bilateral agreements signed between Brazil and Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, for example, it can be observed that they are defined as 'cooperation agreements'.<sup>21</sup> An even better example is to look at the bilateral relationship between Brazil and France. Whereas the parts cooperated in technical and scientific matters during the 1980s, only in 2008 the parties signed an agreement, which officially established a 'strategic partnership'.<sup>22</sup> This confusion comes probably from the belief that a 'strategic partnership' is merely a cooperative relationship based on shared strategic goals, and this is a mistake. 'Strategic partnerships' as of the 1990s – as I will further argue – frame different kinds of bilateral engagement in comparison to previous forms of cooperation.

The major problem in Lessa's argument is that he assumes a clear fixed definition for 'strategic partnership', and supposes that the 'new generation of strategic partnerships' is a vulgarization of this old concept. Even if the expression really acquired a more normative and blurry meaning as he argues – supposed it had already been used before –, his mistake is the assumption that this term should keep the same meaning it had before – supposedly the right one – and that this change in meaning is a negative phenomenon defined in terms of 'vulgarization'.

On the other hand, Lessa raises an important point when he tries to look at a specific case, not trying to provide a generalization of the idea of 'strategic partnership', but giving an interpretation for the meaning of this expression in the Brazilian diplomatic mind-set. Another important element brought by the author is what he calls the 'new generation of strategic partnerships'. When the author presents this idea, he makes reference to the fact that Brazil had implemented 'strategic partnerships' in the past – which I do not agree with – and that in the 2000s it started implementing a number of relationships defined by the same expression despite the fact that these new relationships are different from the old strategic partnerships. Thus the

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<sup>21</sup> According to the list of diplomatic instruments between Brazil and Germany available at the website of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <<http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/temas/temas-politicos-e-relacoes-bilaterais/europa/alemanha/pdf>>, accessed on 2 March 2011.

<sup>22</sup> According to the list of diplomatic instruments between Brazil and France available at the website of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <<http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/temas/temas-politicos-e-relacoes-bilaterais/europa/franca/pdf>>, accessed on 2 March 2011.

author argues that ‘strategic partnership’ assumes the function of a simple label. In this regard, I would like to stress the fact that, as of the 1990s and during the 2000s, there was a significant increase in the use of ‘strategic partnership’ by international political actors as a way to define their cooperative relationships. The Brazilian case, and its ‘new generation of strategic partnerships’, is just a single case of this global phenomenon. This creates a scenario characterized by the legitimization of ‘strategic partnership’ to define cooperative relationships, in spite of the already mentioned problems regarding the clarity of its meaning.

In this context, I discuss if it is possible to define the meaning of ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics. Emerson (2001, p. 45) understands strategic partnerships as a kind of relationship, which ‘involves two actors that are powerful and capable of taking strategic action together.’ In turn, the Routledge Encyclopedia of Political Economy (2001) defines a strategic partnership between states as a political instrument to facilitate the intensification of the economical relationship between the parties involved. Marius Vahl (2001, p. 4) argues that:

‘[i]t has been suggested that the presence of *common values*, *common interests* and *mutual understanding* are essential criteria for a ‘partnership’, as opposed to mere ‘co-operation’. It could furthermore be argued that a prerequisite for a proper ‘partnership’ is that it must be between generally similar parties of roughly *equal size*. The importance of the last criterion is evident in Russia’s EU-strategy, which emphasizes that the partnership should be “on the basis of equality”. But it is difficult, to say the least, to regard the EU and Russia as equals. The asymmetric nature of the relationship between Russia and the EU is a considerable obstacle to the emergence of a “strategic partnership”’.

De Wilde and Pellon (2006, p.123) state that ‘the strategic partnership between EU and Russia is a real challenge from the point of view of common values’, what suggests that common values are a necessary element in a relationship defined as ‘strategic partnership’. In turn, Danilov and De Spiegeleire (1998) state that in the context of Russia-EU relations there is a ‘recent inflation (and hence devaluation) of the concept of “strategic partnership”’, although they do not discuss what this term engenders.

Clearly there is a lack of consensus about the meaning of this expression. Emerson (2001) defines it in terms of the possibility of taking strategic action but does not explain what strategic action means. The Routledge Encyclopedia (2001) presents an understanding that focuses on the economic dimension of the international relations. Vahl (2001) stresses the elements of common values, common interests and mutual understanding but also points out the element of ‘equality of size’. Nevertheless, the author recognizes that these pre-conditions are not fulfilled in the case of the EU-Russia relationship, which is frequently defined as a strategic partnership. On the other hand, according to Holslag (2011) strategic partnerships are characterized by ‘five main features’, which include ‘identified *common interests and expectations*’ ‘formulated for the *long term*’; are ‘*multidimensional* and operationalized in the



economic, political *and* military areas of interest’; have a ‘*global* range’; and are relationships in which ‘incentives should be of such a nature that they cannot be achieved without partnership and serve to *distinguish* it from other relationships’ (Holslag, 2011, 295). For the author, ‘[s]trategic partnerships have more to do with form than with purpose’.

Hence, it is difficult to create an all-encompassing definition of ‘strategic partnership’ that copes with the different features found in empirical cases. For example, by comparing the strategic partnerships between the EU and Ukraine and the one between the EU and China, one can observe how the elements of ‘equality of size’, presence of common values and common interests play an extremely different role. If one takes other empirical examples into account, it is clear that Holslag’s ‘five main features’ do not apply in most of the cases. That is the reason why most analysts and policy-makers tend to simply not problematize the concept and use it as if its meaning were of common knowledge – another reason is that for policy-makers it is sometimes convenient not to work with a clear definition.<sup>23</sup> However, some authors have been making an effort to provide a more consistent approach to the use of ‘strategic partnership’.

Starting with a simple ‘partnership’, Powell (2004, pp. 25-26) has argued that it ‘is not about deferring to others; it is about working with them’. Regarding the adjective ‘strategic’ Khandekar (2011) argues that ‘[i]n international relations, one implication of “strategic” in the most basic sense would be having an interest and fixing a goal thereof’ and she argues moreover that ‘[t]he EU’s strategic partnerships would therefore clearly mean the aid of these partners in achieving certain pre-meditated goals. In practice though, we are a far cry from the above’. But perhaps the best attempt to provide an all-encompassing description of what a ‘strategic partnership’ ideally is was developed by Grevi (2010):

‘[p]artnerships do not become strategic by virtue of defining them as such. The debate on who is a strategic partner and who is not is a circular one and the practice of attributing such political status is quite inconsistent. Both the “strategic” quality and the “partnership” nature of relations with individual countries are often questioned. (...) Strategic partnerships are those that both parties regard as essential to achieve their basic goals. This is because the cooperation of strategic partners can lead to win-win games and, conversely, because such partners are those who could inflict most harm to one another were relations to turn sour. (...) Strategic partnerships are therefore important bilateral means to pursue core goals. As such, they may concern pivotal global but also regional actors. What matters is that they deliver. (...) Effective partnerships are bilateral relations that should contribute to bridging over various levels of cooperation.’ (Grevi, 2010, pp. 2-3, 5)

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<sup>23</sup> This is also a relevant discussion. Who are those responsible for defining a relationship as a ‘strategic partnership’? I argue that the policy-makers are not the sole responsible for it. Analysts and the media have been playing an important role in the consolidation of this expression in the vocabulary of international politics. And even in individual cases the use of this language or criticisms concerning its use by analysts and the media are important elements for the constitution of the linguistic environment in which this expression is legitimized and acquires its specific meaning.

I agree with Grevi in some points. In fact, it can be said that a ‘strategic partnership’ can be an important bilateral instrument to pursue core goals. I also agree that partnerships do not simply become strategic because they are defined as such. However, the fact that these partnerships are defined in a specific way – by the introduction of the adjective ‘strategic’ – shows that the actor who defines the relationship as such is being driven by a particular objective when he makes such an assertion and that this discursive practice can really make a relationship more ‘strategic’. It is also important to note that the attribution of the status of ‘strategic partner’ can be quite inconsistent. However, whereas there is a macro inconsistency in the assignment of this status among different international political actors, there are examples that show consistency in the use of this expression when the foreign policy discourse of individual actors are taken into account. Another case in point is that ‘strategic partnerships’ are not always relationships in which the partners consider each other essential to achieve their basic goals. There are certainly interests on both sides involved when a ‘strategic partnership’ is established, but that both parties consider this relationship essential, is an assertion that does not match empirical observation. In addition, when Grevi says that effective partnerships should contribute to bridging over various levels of cooperation, I agree with him, but I would also say that it can be more than that. A ‘strategic partnership’ can be designed to transcend cooperation and have normative consequences on the level of interaction and systemic structure. Finally, another problem with Grevi’s understanding of this concept is that he associates it with a fixed understanding of the terms ‘partnership’ and ‘strategic’. A way to prove this point is to make a short etymological analysis of ‘strategic partnership’.

Hence, I will analyze both terms separately. I start with the word ‘partnership’ and I discuss the word as it is used in English. This is important to point out since in many Indo-European languages the etymological root of the word is the same (e.g. the German ‘Partnerschaft’, the French ‘partenariat’, the Russian ‘parterstvo’), but in other languages the etymological origin of the equivalent terminology is quite different (e.g. the Portuguese ‘parceria’, which comes from the Latin ‘partiarium’ – someone who shares something<sup>24</sup> – and the Spanish ‘asociación’). In non-Indo-European languages the root of the equivalent word can even be completely different.

According to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* a ‘partnership’ is ‘the fact or condition of being a partner; association or participation as a partner’ and ‘partner’ – which comes from the French *parcener* – is ‘a person who possesses something

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<sup>24</sup> Machado, 1967.

jointly with another or others; a person who takes part with another or others in doing something; an associate, a colleague; a player on the same side in the game; a spouse, a member of a couple who live together or are habitual companions'. In *An etymological dictionary of the English language* a 'partner' – which comes from the old French *parcener* and from the Latin *partition*, which comes from the word *partition* – is seen as a 'sharer, associate'. In turn, in *A Latin dictionary* 'partition' is defined as 'a sharing, parting, partition; a division, distribution ... a logical division into parts or members, a partition.'

In that context, I stress the idea of 'sharing' that is present in the use of the word 'partnership'. I also point out the notion of 'players on the same side in the game'. This notion is important because it suggests that partners share common goals and thus have to some extent common interests and common values. Certainly, that does not mean that the partners must be friends to cooperatively pursue common goals, but suggests that some degree of solidarity must be present in their relationship.<sup>25</sup>

Moving the discussion to the word 'strategic', the *Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* defines it as 'of or pertaining to strategy; useful or important with regard to strategy; ... concerned with or involving careful planning towards an advantage.' In the same dictionary it can be found a definition for the noun strategy as '[a] government or province ruled by a strategus (rare). The office of a strategus<sup>26</sup> (rare). The art of a commander-in-chief; the planning and direction of the larger military movements and overall operations of a campaign (...), the art of skill or careful planning towards an advantage or a desired end'.

Luttwak (1987) also presents a number of contemporary definitions for the word 'strategy'. Quoting the *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, he argues that 'strategy' concerns '[t]he science and art of employing the political, economic, psychological, and military forces of a nation or group of nations to afford the maximum support to adopted policies in peace or war' (apud. Luttwak, 1987, p. 240). King's (1960, p. 14) 'clausewitzian American contemporary' understanding of the noun would be to consider it '[a] science, an art, or a plan (subject to revision) governing the raising, arming, and utilization of the military forces of a nation (or coalitions) to the end that its interests will be effectively promoted or secured against enemies, actual, potential or merely presumed' (apud. Luttwak, 1987, p. 240). And a 'sovietic interpretation' of this term (Sokolovsky, 1975, p. 11) would be to consider that 'strategy':

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<sup>25</sup> This point will be further discussed in a following section of this chapter.

<sup>26</sup> According to the same dictionary 'strategus' is the Latinized version of the Greek 'strategos' meaning '[a] commander-in-chief, general, or chief magistrate at Athens and in the Achaean League.'

‘on the basis of military experience, military and political conditions, economic and moral potential of the country, new means of combat, and the views and potential of the probable enemy[,] studies the conditions and the nature of future war, the methods for its preparation and conduct, the services of the armed forces and the foundations of their strategic utilization, as well as foundations for the material and technical support and leadership of the war and the armed forces. At the same time, this is the area of the practical activity of the higher military and political leadership, of the supreme command, and of the higher headquarters, that pertain to the art of preparing a country and the armed forces for war and conducting war.’ (apud. Luttwak, 1987, p. 240-241)

Luttwak also stresses the understanding of General André Beaufre (1963, p. 16), to whom ‘strategy’ is ‘the art of the dialectics of wills that use force to resolve their conflict’ (apud. Luttwak, p. 241).

In that context, it can be seen that in its origin and in its common use, the nouns ‘strategic’ and ‘strategy’ are associated with the military conflict, with the preparation of an optimal deployment of forces. But I would like to underline its meaning beyond the context of conflict. I highlight especially the above mentioned idea of ‘planning towards an advantage or a desired end’. By focusing on this meaning of ‘strategic’ and connecting it with the above mentioned notion of partnership as a relationship between or among players that share a common interest or common goals, and maybe even common values and for that reason stand on the same side, I may define ‘strategic partnership’ in broad terms as *a relationship in which a coordinated planning is implemented towards a desired end, which is a common goal of the parties involved and that is based on common interests or even common values.*

The problem with this understanding of strategic partnership, like Grevi’s, is that it is associated with the expectation of a fixed meaning. Moreover, it does not problematize the expression but it just reinforces or stabilizes a fixed definition of the term. I do not want to simply accept an understanding of ‘strategic partnership’ drawn from the dictionaries, which certainly is too general to address the complexity of ‘strategic partnership’ as a political phenomenon. I want to problematize ‘strategic partnership’, i.e. I want to understand how the ‘strategic partners’ relate to one another in the pursuit of a shared goal. Despite being on the same side, the idea of equality between the parties does not always play an essential role. Sometimes a relationship characterized by balanced interests or even dependence may be the case, but not always. Depending on the strategic goals that are pursued, it is not clear which dynamic characterizes the relationship between the parties to define it as a ‘strategic partnership’. A friendly relationship naturally facilitates the implementation of any common endeavor, but it is not a *conditio sine qua non*. Although real enemies certainly do not share common interests towards developing a kind of relationship based on common strategic goals, rivals could certainly share particular strategic interests that could legitimize a more limited ‘strategic partnership’. It seems that what defines a relationship as a ‘strategic partnership’ is

rather its pragmatic character based on the kind of strategic goal pursued. In that context, although some kind of values must be shared, it does not mean that strategic partners must be friends. These are the terms of the discussion that I want to work with and this is why I am not inclined to limit my approach to 'strategic partnership' as the simple elaboration of a definition.

After providing his understanding of a 'strategic partnership', Grevi (2010) argues that the criteria used to define the strategic partners of the EU should take 'common sense' into consideration. Thus he sees an all-encompassing definition of 'strategic partnership', based on a derivation of the meanings of 'partnership' and 'strategic', insufficient to cope with the reality of foreign policy-making. He suggests that a broad understanding is possible, but that a look at the specificities of each case is necessary to have a clearer understanding of what 'strategic partnership' might mean.

In comparison to other discussions about strategic partnerships, Wilkins (2008, 2012) proposes the most theoretically developed approach to 'strategic partnership'. The author argues that strategic partnerships can be categorized as one archetype within a taxonomy of alignments, which also includes 'alliances', 'coalitions', 'security community' and other forms like 'concert', 'entente' and 'non-aggression pact'. One interesting aspect of the author's account is that he discusses four 'properties' of strategic partnerships: the first is that they are based on a 'system principle'; the second that they are 'goal-driven'; thirdly, 'tend to be informal in nature'; and fourthly are frequently associated with 'economic exchange' and 'more traditional security concerns' (2012, p. 68). Thus the author argues that with the exception of possible variations, strategic partnerships are basically a form of alignment that obeys a set of fixed parameters. From this assumption, he suggests an approach to strategic partnerships based on an organizational perspective, which 'looks at several organizational dimensions through a division into three sequential phases of development across a collaboration continuum: *formation, implementation, and evaluation.*'

There are some important elements found in Wilkins' approach. The author makes a theoretically relevant discussion on the initial formative phase of a 'strategic partnership'. According to Wilkins (2008, p. 364), in this phase '[c]ommon purpose becomes solidified into an overarching framework of mutual agreement and understanding known as a system principle'. The author also presents an interesting broad definition of 'strategic partnership'. However, Wilkins' approach is also problematic. The author treats 'strategic partnership' as a typology of cooperative engagement between international political actors characterized by some set of properties. He envisages the possibility that strategic partnerships can develop differently but ultimately this expression is fixed as a label for a form of association based on

set parameters. He fails to problematize the employment of this term and to assess the functions of ‘strategic partnership’ as a political concept used to frame different forms of cooperative engagement in international politics.

In that context, I would say I agree with Jain (2008, p. 277) who states that ‘[t]hough the term “strategic partnership” has been used with greater frequency in recent years, there is ‘no definition” of a strategic partnership’. However I take my argument further in arguing that one should not look for a simple broad definition. Each ‘strategic partnership’ must be analyzed separately. It must be observed and understood as a context-specific phenomenon, in which the use of this expression changes its understanding. It is however fundamental that the analysis does not neglect the whole vocabulary or linguistic context of which ‘strategic partnership’ is part. Thus my next step is to discuss how this expression can be assessed with reference to other terms and expressions commonly used to define cooperative relationships between international political actors.

### **3.2 Assessing Cooperation-related Concepts in International Politics**

Many words can be used as a way to intensify, strengthen or even reformulate relationships conducted by international political actors. In general they are all forms of cooperation and their use can often hide differences of meaning.<sup>27</sup> However, concepts should be treated according to the specificity of the use intended by the person enunciating them.

I have previously pointed out how the meaning of the expression ‘strategic partnership’, as it has been used by the European Union, is usually criticized for a lack of precision. But the scenario is a bit more confusing than it seems. A country that conducts some kind of bilateral relationship with the European Union may follow a simple ‘cooperation’-based relationship, but could also be either a ‘partner’, integrate a regional partnership, be an ‘associate country’, have a ‘customs union’ or establish a ‘free trade agreement’ with the EU. It could also be a ‘potential candidate to membership’, a ‘candidate to membership’ or a ‘strategic partner’.<sup>28</sup> Evidently titles like ‘partner’ should be differentiated from the condition of implementing an

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<sup>27</sup> Ghez (2011) for example presents alliances and partnerships as interchangeable concepts. The author includes all forms of cooperation between international political actors as alliances and proposes a taxonomy of tactical, historical and natural alliances. Tactical alliances are seen by the author as short-term relationships aimed at opposing an immediate threat or adversary; historical alliances are resilient relationships ‘that sustain in spite of significant ruptures and changes in the international system’ being able to ‘redefine their purpose’; and natural alliances are those which, based on ‘commonalities in political culture and in narratives about how the world works or should work’ and institutions ‘allow the alliance to self-sustain and strengthen over time.’

<sup>28</sup> This discussion will be further developed in the next chapter. And as I will show in Chapter 5, in the case of EU-Russia relations, initially the expression used was ‘substantial partnership’ and only later will ‘strategic partnership’ become the expression used to define this bilateral relationship.

agreement, like a ‘customs union’, but the great difficulty is not to understand the difference between categories of relationship – ‘labels’ – and shared instruments of cooperation. The main challenge is to understand how each label relates to a set of possible cooperative measures and legal instruments that can be implemented. It is a question of the expectations that are generated when a particular label is chosen. Should, for example, some kind of agreement aimed at trade liberalization be implemented with a country defined as a ‘partner’? Which country should be taken as more relevant for the EU, an ‘associate country’ or a ‘partner’? Should a ‘strategic partner’ necessarily expect the negotiation of a free trade agreement or should this country expect that the relationship will only reinforce channels of communication and promote specific technical cooperative measures? What differentiates a partner with whom the EU signed a ‘partnership and cooperation agreement’ from a ‘strategic partner’?

These questions can be even trickier when individual cases are observed. Which country should be considered to have a more relevant relationship with the EU: Turkey, who has an associate agreement, a customs union and is a candidate to accession? Or Brazil, who is officially a strategic partner? These are terms limited to the scope of EU bilateral relations though. Other expressions and terms can be identified when the foreign policy of other international political actors is taken into consideration. The US and the UK, for example, claimed for many decades that they had a ‘special relationship’.<sup>29</sup> For a long period of time this label was used to sustain the idea that for both sides this relationship was a priority, standing above any other bilateral relationship in which they could engage. This language later became a symbol of legitimization for the unconditional support of the British government to the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and to the ‘War on Terror’. In 2010, a statement of the British Common Foreign Affairs Committee declared, however, that this expression was ‘potentially misleading’ and did not ‘reflect the “modern” Anglo-American relationship’.<sup>30</sup> For this group of members of the parliament, UK’s weakened economy and military power led to a ‘diminished’ international influence of the country, which prevented the use of this particular term to frame the bilateral relations with the US. Trying to solve this legitimacy issue and making a statement during an official visit to England in May 2011, the American President Barack Obama and the British Prime Minister David Cameron jointly published an article in which they introduced a new concept to define the Anglo-American relationship: ‘essential relationship’.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Special relationship between UK and US is over, MPs say’, *BBC News*, 28 March 2010, <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/8590767.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/8590767.stm)>, accessed 2 April 2011.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* See also Robinson (2011).

The British-American case points to the relevance of language used for the legitimacy of a relationship but also for the constitution of the role of each one of the parties involved within the bilateral relationship. Just like the Turkish-Brazilian case highlighted above, one may also wonder why the relationship with the UK is taken as a ‘special relationship’ by the US while Pakistan, India and Turkey are called ‘strategic partners’. Why is a different status granted to the UK when all these states are important foreign policy partners of the US?

I raise this topic because it generates a significant amount of uncertainty about the relation between the term used to define a relationship and the consequences of the ‘label’ used to the actual scope of this relationship. Hubbell (1999, p. 159) argues that former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, already in the 1990s, used ‘strategic cooperation’ and ‘strategic partnership’ to address the US-China relationship, and this supposedly caused some concern to other Asian partners of the US. Interestingly, Pomfret (2001) argues that whereas in the US in the 1990s the expression ‘strategic partnership’ was common to refer to China, it was later on replaced – in the use made by George W. Bush in his presidential campaign – by the expression ‘strategic competitor’. Also, in a joint statement with NATO’s Secretary Anders Fogh Rasmussen on 22 October 2010, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel called attention to the fact that there should be a clear differentiation between a ‘partnership’ that may evolve to a ‘strategic partnership’ and some kind of membership in the context of Russia-NATO relations.<sup>32</sup>

In another example, Felix Peña (2010b) argues that there can be some confusion between strategic partnership agreements and agreements involving commercial preferences following articles XXIV of the GATT and article V of the GATS. The author argues that commercial preferences agreements are supposedly more objective and deeper with regard to its content, while strategic partnerships may be relevant because they are an opportunity for the parties to show their will to promote cooperation in a greater set of areas, transcending the exclusive economic field. Nevertheless, Peña argues that when a ‘strategic partnership’ is able to promote ‘the intensification of the physical and economic connection between the respective countries, especially of the crossed investments between their firms or of the cooperation among their research and development centers’,<sup>33</sup> it may generate a superior economic impact than some commercial preferences agreements. Thus I have shown so far that there are many concepts and ideas to be taken into consideration when there is an intention to use the term ‘strategic partnership’. However, the one basic notion that stands behind all these labels and

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<sup>32</sup> *Pressestatements von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel und Nato-Generalsekretär Rasmussen, 22 October 2010*, <[http://www.bundestkanzlerin.de/nn\\_683698/Content/DE/Mitschrift/Pressekonferenzen/2010/10/2010-10-22-pk-rasmussen.html](http://www.bundestkanzlerin.de/nn_683698/Content/DE/Mitschrift/Pressekonferenzen/2010/10/2010-10-22-pk-rasmussen.html)>, accessed on 5 April 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Free translation from Spanish.



concepts is ‘cooperation’. In this context, it might be useful to assess how this basic notion can be understood.

According to the *Oxford Dictionaries* ‘cooperation’ is ‘the process of working together to the same end’. In contrast to the expression on which I focus in this thesis, this understanding of the idea of cooperation has been well established in the vocabulary of international politics and does not generate much concern. In the context of the International Relations as a discipline, its relevance relates less to its meaning than to how it matches the behavior of states. Whereas more traditional realist accounts based on the idea of a zero-sum game deny the possibility of interstate cooperative action capable to maximize the interests of all the parties involved – unless as a way to balance the power of more powerful third party – all other accounts acknowledge the possibility of cooperative interest-maximizing behavior among states. When Bull (1995) argues that the international society is based on fundamental institutions which allow states to solve coordination and collaboration problems to keep order in an anarchical environment, he acknowledges that interstate cooperation is a necessity in the international realm.

But leaving the more theoretical IR discussions aside, as the definition presented above states, cooperation occurs when the parties observe that they have a common interest and that a cooperative behavior is either the only way to reach their goal or a more optimal approach to reach their goal. In that sense, cooperation ranges from simple technical cooperation to a military alliance to defeat a common enemy. In this context, all the expressions mentioned are forms of defining cooperative relationships. But the forms of cooperative behavior may be differentiated into two groups. On one side there are forms of cooperation like EUs members, associate countries, or countries with whom the EU possesses economic preferences – free-trade agreements or customs union agreements – and formal alliances, which are dependent on legal instruments that establish expected conditions of behavior among the parties on matters clearly defined by them. On the other hand, there are relationships like ‘partnership’, ‘special relationship’ and ‘strategic partnership’, in which the focus is found less on legal substantive matters and expected behavior of the parts involved than on the status created by the use of the chosen term.<sup>34</sup> I am not arguing that these kinds of relationship are empty in regard to their content. I am not saying that they may not have a very significant effect on the dynamics between the partners and have a strong influence in their behavior either – that is actually one

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<sup>34</sup> That does not mean that there are not formal aspects in the establishment of these relationships. EU’s partners and strategic partners for example are normally formally legitimized as such by formal documents like ‘Partnership and Cooperation Agreements’.

of the main arguments that I am trying to develop. However, I do call attention to the fact that ‘partnerships’, ‘special relationships’ and ‘strategic partnerships’ may transcend the more basic dimension of cooperation towards specified goals and serve as a language that promotes differentiation in relation to the rest. To illustrate my point, I will outline some examples.

In article 3 of the preamble of the *United States-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership* signed on 19 December 2008 the parties state that they are willing to ‘stress [their] mutual desire to strengthen [their] relationship across the economic, political, diplomatic, cultural, and security fields’. Thus, for example, they state in section II – *Defense and Security Cooperation* – that ‘[w]orking within the framework of the NATO-Ukraine Commission, our goal is to gain agreement on a structured plan to increase interoperability and coordination of capabilities between NATO and Ukraine, including via enhanced training and equipment for Ukrainian armed forces’ and in section III – *Economic, Trade and Energy Cooperation* – that ‘[r]ecognizing the importance of a well functioning energy sector, the parties intend to work closely together on rehabilitating and modernizing the capacity of Ukraine’s gas transit infrastructure and diversify and secure Ukraine’s sources of nuclear fuel making Ukraine less dependent on foreign sources of nuclear fuel and nuclear fuel storage.’ Thus this ‘strategic partnership’ tries to deepen cooperation in areas like energy, security, and trade through agreed specific measures between both sides.

In turn, I present an example of a ‘partnership and cooperation agreement’ that constitutes the idea of a relationship between ‘simple’ partners. In 1999 Georgia and the European Union signed such kind of agreement’. Article 1 reads:

‘[a] partnership is hereby established between the Community and its Member States of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part. The objectives of this partnership are: to provide an appropriate framework for the political dialogue between the Parties allowing the development of political relations, to support Georgia's efforts to consolidate its democracy and to develop its economy and to complete the transition into a market economy, to promote trade and investment and harmonious economic relations between the Parties and so to foster their sustainable economic development, to provide a basis for legislative, economic, social, financial, civil scientific, technological and cultural cooperation.’

As it can be observed in this citation, the thematic areas covered by a ‘partnership’ and a ‘strategic partnership’ are the same. Another important point that I should stress is that ‘strategic partnership’ does not have to be formalized in an agreement – like the previously mentioned ‘strategic partnership’ between Brazil and France – to be acknowledged as such. I will discuss in Chapter 5, for example, that in the case of the EU-Russia relationship, the main legal instrument that frames the bilateral relationship is still a ‘partnership agreement’ and both sides officially recognize each other as a ‘strategic partnership’.

The two cases presented above show that there is no difference regarding content between a ‘partnership’ and a ‘strategic partnership’. However, I would argue that ‘strategic partnership’ is a term that can give more status than simple ‘partnership’, making the use of this term a relevant instrument of differentiation and hierarchization. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the use of this expression has been growing in recent years. But one should not assume that a ‘strategic partnership’ will always be taken as more important than a ‘simple’ ‘partnership’.

By looking at the language used by the United States of America and the European Union to define their ‘transatlantic relationship’ it is clear that the parties normally do not use the expression ‘strategic partnership’, but stress the idea of ‘partnership’.<sup>35</sup> The *EU-US Summit Joint Declaration* from 20 November 2010 states that they constitute a ‘close’ and ‘deepening’ ‘partnership’ in which three key areas of cooperation are considered vital: ‘first, how to ensure strong, balanced and sustainable economic growth and how to create jobs, including in new, emerging fields; second, how to meet global challenges such as climate change and international development; and third, how to strengthen the security of our citizens’. Thus the use of the word ‘partnership’ instead of the expression ‘strategic partnership’ does not mean that the United States has a weaker strategic relevance for the EU in comparison to EU’s strategic partners. The opposite is actually the case. Stressing the major relevance of the EU-US relationship Burghardt (2006) has stated that:

‘[t]oday, the EU-US relationship is still the most powerful, the most comprehensive and the strategically most important relationship in the world: most powerful because the EU and the US combine some 60% of the world's GDP, with the EU having overtaken the US numbers of around US \$10 trillion recently. They represent around 40% of world trade in goods and even more in services. They hold 80% of the global capital markets. They are each other's main trading partner and source, as much as recipient, of foreign direct investment. Most comprehensive because there is scarcely an issue that does not involve the transatlantic relationship – from Afghanistan to biotech, from WTO negotiations to counter-terrorism, from data privacy to aircraft – the EU and US are involved bilaterally, regionally or globally. Strategically most important because Europe matters to America, and America matters to Europe, because of major converging concerns, largely compatible values and over-lapping interests. The EU and the US share common objectives with regard to coherent strategies for the promotion of peace, stability and economic development around the globe. There is – in the short and medium term – no alternative to the EU-US relationship.’

Joao Vale de Almeida, ambassador of the European Union to the United States, confirms this unequal relevance of the relationship with the US to the European Union. In his speech on 9 December 2010, he stressed the necessity to ‘maintain a partnership that is without equal in

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<sup>35</sup> As I will discuss in the next chapter, the labeling of the US as one of the EU’s strategic partners is not very consistent. There is a conflict between the official discourse found in statements and the internal considerations of the European External Action Service. Whereas most diplomatic discourse does not use ‘strategic partnership’, documents produced by the EEAS – e.g. the report *Strategic Partners* (2010) – started using this expression to define the relationship with the US.

the world' in which '[w]e share strategic objectives on the most important foreign policy issues and cooperate closely on diplomatic solutions'. Hence, if the standardized meaning of 'strategic' is taken into consideration no relationship is more 'strategic' to the EU than its partnership with the United States of America. Yet, it is not necessary that the parties state that their relationship is a 'strategic partnership' for the whole world to be aware of its relevance and strategic character. In that context, I reinforce my point on how sometimes the content of a 'strategic partnership' is less important than the use of this language as a means to differentiate and give a higher status to specific relationships between international political actors.

In fact, 'partnerships', 'alliances', 'special relationships', 'strategic partnerships' and 'essential relationships' are all forms of cooperative behavior between international political actors. The best way to understand the differences among them and why foreign policy-makers make a choice for one or the other is to observe how each concept relates hierarchically within the foreign policy of each individual international political actor. To give an example, for Brazil a 'strategic partnership' with the European Union puts the European Union in very hierarchic position in comparison to other Brazilian partners. In turn, for the European Union the Brazilian status of 'strategic partner' elevates this country to a group of high priority partners within the realm of European foreign policy, that is, a relationship with higher priority than most normal partners with the exception of one: the United States.

Thus the range of issues and areas of cooperation covered by a 'strategic partnership' is indeed quite broad. It may deal with a single specific issue or may incorporate an interest of cooperation in a greater spectrum of issue-areas. In addition, I should stress that the enunciation of 'strategic partnership' in a context of international politics must be observed in comparison to other expressions and acquires in the present moment an important normative dimension. However, I do not claim that 'strategic partnerships' is empty political rhetoric and that the substantial content of such relationships is irrelevant. As I will further argue, the use of 'strategic partnership' demonstrates the rationale of those who enunciate this expression and the use of this language not only depends of the rules and the context that frame the relationship between the parties involved but also may have an influence on the reconfiguration of these rules and in the future of the relationship in question. In that context, I now turn to a discussion of the relevance of values in the framing process of a 'strategic partnership'.

### 3.3 Values and Notions of Enmity, Rivalry and Friendship

In the preamble of the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* (1997) between the EU and Russia, the parties stress ‘the importance of the historical links existing between the Community, its Member States and Russia and the common values that they share’. This kind of reference to values and common goals is very common in the preambles of diplomatic instruments and is an effort to contextualize and legitimize the fundamentals of cooperation between the parties involved. In the *Agreement on mutual recognition between the European Community and the United States of America* (1998), for example, the parties stress ‘the traditional links of friendship’ on which their relationship is based. In the above mentioned speech on 9 December 2010, Ambassador Joao Vale de Almeida also stressed ‘our values of freedom, democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights’. However, it can be discussed to what extent a ‘strategic partnership’ needs to be sustained by common values.

A significant group of analysts who comment on the state of the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’ argue that the element of shared values is a major impediment for the success of this initiative. Kempe and Smith (2006) point to the existence of a growing gap between both countries concerning some specific issues like the structure of democratic institutions, the rights of civil society, and the concept of state sovereignty (Kempe und Smith, 2006, p. 2). This supposed ‘gap of values’ is seen as an explanation for pessimistic expectations regarding the future of the bilateral relationship (Medvedev, 2006; Krastev, 2007). It is what sustains the above mentioned arguments of Danilov and De Spiegeleire (1998) about the inflation and devaluation of the ‘strategic partnership’ concept when they analyze the Euro-Russian relationship.

Hence, it can be observed that these authors argue that an effective ‘strategic partnership’ must be sustained by shared values and some set of common ideas, which allow the parties to successfully cooperate to achieve common goals. The rationale is – as it is argued by authors like Wendt (1999) – that any international action is based on shared values and ideas which sustain common interests and goals. Since the focus of a ‘strategic’ partnership is allegedly the development of cooperation in shared strategic areas of interest, by this logic any conflict concerning values and ideas naturally leads to an ineffective search for goals and the constitution of a failing or ‘false’ strategic partnership.

In line with the arguments of the analysts mentioned above, the document *A secure Europe in a better world: European Security Strategy* (2003) states that ‘we should look to develop strategic partnerships, with (...) all those who share our goals and values, and are prepared to act in their support’. Furthermore, it states that concerning the EU-Russia relations

‘[r]espect for common values will reinforce progress towards a strategic partnership’. But if it is actually a fact that a ‘strategic partnership’ depends on the existence of shared values, it may create a significant problem for countries that want to establish a ‘strategic partnership’ but show a lower degree of value-sharing. For Danilov (2007, p.155) that is the difference between ‘minimal cooperation’ and a ‘strategic partnership’: ‘[e]ither the parties can maintain the status quo and continue minimally cooperation with each other, or they can put their differences aside and work together to establish a strong strategic partnership based on joint long-term goals and objectives and shared values.’

A possible problem of this emphasis on the role of values for the constitution of a ‘strategic partnership’ is that it denies the supposedly pragmatic/goal-oriented nature of a ‘strategic partnership’. In my view that is not the actual problem. The presence or absence of common values may or may not be a fundamental element in a ‘strategic partnership’. Although a complete clash of values may naturally impede any possibility of establishing a cooperative relationship that does not mean the parties need to be ‘friends’ to establish a successful ‘strategic partnership’. Normative interests are always at some level present in the process of constitution of a pragmatic ‘strategic partnership’ – either as the foundation of the goals the strategic partners share or as the intended status which the partners hope to achieve by being recognized as strategic partners. However, the fact that, for example, states like China and Argentina do not share exactly the same set of basic values does not mean that they cannot consider each other strategic partners. If we take into consideration that China is the second most important trade partner of Argentina and that their trade volume has been significantly growing annually, it is an acceptable use of the expression that the Argentinean government declares China its strategic partner. In the same way, if the Chinese foreign strategy towards the African continent is analyzed, it is clear how the element of ‘values’ loses importance in detriment to the more pragmatic goal of obtaining access to raw materials. However, this is no reason to say that China’s relationships in African countries cannot be called ‘strategic partnerships’ by the parties involved. In any case, that does not mean that differences concerning the degree of compatibility of values between the partners will not have a significant effect in the structure of the ‘strategic partnership’ being established, because they will. As I will discuss in the following chapters, this will be a very relevant factor in the comparison of the ‘strategic partnerships’ being developed between the EU and each one of the BRIC countries.

In this context, the Wendt’s (1999) typology may be helpful to illustrate this point. When the author develops his argument about ‘anarchy is what states make of it’, he conceptualizes

international relations ideally as an arena in which there are three possible logics of relationship among states, three ‘cultures of anarchy’. Wendt establishes subdivisions in each group which make reference to the degree of internalization of this logic of behavior in each case but in the context of the present thesis it is enough to point out the three cultures of anarchy and the kind of relationship to which they are related: Hobbesian and the idea of enmity, Lockean and the idea of rivalry, and Kantian and the idea of friendship. Naturally, relationships among states and other international political actors are much more complex than these three ideas could describe, but these ideal types fit well to the argument that I seek to develop.

If there is a strong opposition or conflict between two actors – it does not need to be a case in which they do not recognize the right to each other to exist, as argued by Wendt, but, for example, when it is argued that the values that inspire the action of the other do not have legitimacy, leading to a situation of clash – they are presenting a behavior of enmity. On the other hand, there are actors who share values and ideas to such a degree that they share not only common views on specific issues but also a common world order perspective. Furthermore, these actors incorporate the interests of the other as a relevant factor in the calculation of their self-interests, adapting their behavior to fit the interest of the other and choosing cooperative action instead of the risk of conflict. Such actors develop a relationship of friendship. Finally, there is the relationship of rivalry. In this scenario, the actors involved conduct their behavior according to a rational calculation. They will choose to behave themselves in a way that they will be able to maximize their self-interest. They may evaluate the possibility of cooperation, make concessions and even start a conflict in each individual case but always taking into consideration only what is best for them.

When a group of MPs in the United Kingdom says that the language of ‘special relationship’ is inadequate to address the current state of the UK-US relations, these politicians are saying that a relationship understood as a friendship-based relationship – capable, for example, of making the United Kingdom support the invasion of Iraq in spite of the inexistence of any evidence that could legitimize it – no longer exists. According to these MPs – because of the loss of British capacity of power projection – the bilateral relationship is losing its characteristics of friendship and thus does not correspond anymore to the understanding associated with the expression ‘special relationship’ as it was developed throughout the history of the Anglo-American relationship.

As stated previously, any ‘strategic partnership’ is a cooperative relationship. Thus, a relationship defined as such cannot be constituted by enemies. But taking into consideration that friendships are a rare phenomenon in international politics, a ‘strategic partnership’ can be

established by any pair of international actors as long as they do not perceive each other as enemies. In this context, I disagree with those who argue that the existence of a gap of values excludes the possibility of defining a relationship as a 'strategic partnership', although I agree that this gap may limit the scope of the relationship being conducted.

Taking again the partnership between the EU and the US, it is clear that the vast number of areas in which these actors cooperate derives from the vast number of goals shared. But the existence of a great number of shared goals is a reflection of the value-compatibility that characterizes this bilateral relationship. Indurthy (2002, p. 3), for example, declares after observing that the India-US relationship has been showing signs of improvement that 'the question to explore is whether the growing friendship will lead to a strategic partnership between the two countries.' This shows the author's belief that a 'strategic partnership' is more likely to be established if the relationship between the parties has or develops characteristics in line with a friendship. Hence, I do not agree with the critics of the use of 'strategic partnership' in the context of the EU-Russia relations. However, the fact that I do not agree with these criticisms does not mean that the gap of values is not an important issue. It all depends on the relationship which the parties are trying to develop. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, the EU-Russia 'strategic partnership' is a very ambitious relationship and in this specific context the gap of values destabilizes the strategic partnership but is also a condition of its existence.

For the purposes of this chapter, I will not extend this discussion further and argue that the more the parties involved share values and are closer to a relationship of friendship, the more they are able to develop common strategic goals and establish a deeper cooperative relationship that can be labeled as a 'strategic partnership'. Moreover, I could argue that the legitimacy of the use of 'strategic partnership' by an audience is directly proportional to the degree of value sharing existent between the parties involved. However, I would also like to underscore the complexity of analyzing the use of the expression 'strategic partnership', which makes it necessary to look at each specific case to obtain an understanding of what kind of relationship this term engenders and is capable of developing.

### **3.4 'Strategic Partnership': Escaping the 'Friendship/Rivalry' Dichotomy in International Politics**

In this chapter I have argued that the use of the expression 'strategic partnership' in international politics needs to be problematized. Although the types of cooperative measures established



through relationships defined as such are not necessarily new, the more frequent use of this language and its role as the creator of new categorizations of differentiation and hierarchization of the relationships among international political actors shows that a new contemporary phenomenon in international politics can be observed.

In this chapter, I presented some topics related to a broader discussion on the use of this expression. I discussed the possibility of creating a standard definition to this term, how it can be understood in comparison to other terms associated with the idea of cooperation, and the necessity of basic elements – e.g. common values – as preconditions for the establishment of a ‘strategic partnership’. My first conclusion is that generalizations about how ‘strategic partnership’ can be categorized as a general instrument of cooperation between international political actors has not been successful and is not the best way to approach this term, its uses, and its significance.

Jain (2008, p. 290) argues that although both the European Union and the United States have established ‘strategic partnerships’ with India, just by looking at the different documents that frame each one of these relationships shows how these relationships are different. The areas of cooperation covered by them, the degree of concession of the more powerful side, the kind of relational dynamics established, each aspect of these relationships shows how this expression can be employed to constitute very different forms of interaction between the parties even if they are all labeled as ‘strategic partnership’.

The only generalization that can be made is that there is an important contemporary phenomenon in international politics associated with the use of the term ‘strategic partnership’. An expression that was not present in the vocabulary of international political actors is becoming more relevant everyday. And I would argue that its appearance promotes an expansion of the vocabulary of these actors while it reduces the relevance of value-based reasoning. I am not arguing that the use of ‘strategic partnership’ represents the return of realist thinking to international politics. ‘Strategic partnership’ is actually an instrument of reinforcement of normative behavior. The process may be conducted through a pragmatic move which aims at overcoming problems associated with the clash of values and discourses, but in spite of the direct association of the ‘strategic partnership’ with non-normative foreign policy strategies, the use by some international political actors, like the EU, of this concept can be seen as a strategy to not only pursue economic, security and political interests but also to promote the diffusion and internalization of specific values and norms in the system.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> More on this in the following chapters.

Hence, I would like to point out that an interesting consequence of the use of 'strategic partnership' to address relationships between international political actors is that it removes to some extent the focus on the degree of friendship or rivalry between the parties involved. Whereas the growing use of this language does not lead to a reduction in the use of other terms associated with the notion of 'cooperation', it may decrease the relevance of a strong demarcation between the notions of 'friendship' and 'rivalry'.

As I have argued, 'strategic partnership' may be a different term, but it is strongly linked to the idea of 'cooperation'. Its use may introduce a new category of cooperation and broaden the spectrum of possible forms of association between international political actors, but the enunciation of this language does not weaken the relevance of the idea of 'cooperation' in international politics. It must be stressed that under the umbrella of 'strategic partnership' the 'cooperation' concept is often used to address specific areas of common interest between partners. In turn, although not removing practical relevance of the presence of common values in the everyday efforts to reach common goals, the use of the 'strategic partnership' language moves the focus from a discussion on 'values' to a discussion on 'common goals'. This 'pragmatic move' is a discursive tool to enable cooperation while avoiding a discussion on axiological incompatibilities which could undermine cooperation between the parties. Thus, I argue – and I will come back to this discussion when I analyze the case studies in Chapters 5 to 8 – that the more frequent use of 'strategic partnership' by international political actors may have the perlocutionary effect of decreasing the relevance of analyzing possibilities of cooperation with reference to a rivalry/friendship dichotomy. This is an important inference, since it allows the possibility of discussing how the use of 'strategic partnership' may be a valuable instrument of promotion of cooperation between actors who in fact possess clashing values while creating the possibility of helping partners overcome in the long run this 'gap of values' and make their relationship move towards a more friendly scope.

However, this argument should be supported by empirical analysis. The 'strategic partnerships' between the EU and the BRIC countries are good cases to support this argument, especially the relationships involving Russia, India and China. These states show, in a higher or lower degree, a gap in relation to the values that are considered fundamental in the European mind-set. China challenges the EU from the perspective of democracy, human rights and free competition. India, although officially the 'largest democracy of the world', is not a country in which its citizens are treated as equals. And Russia, despite being fundamental not only for the military security but also for the energetic security of the EU, is a state with which the EU maintains a very difficult relationship, always having to manage the dilemma between

disagreements on democracy, human rights and the rule of law and the dependence on resources and the will to create a less conflictive environment. The EU needs a kind of language that allows it to develop a relationship with these states without focusing on the incompatibility of values, which would only make it difficult to advance cooperative initiatives. However, without focusing on values, the EU needs a language through which these values are not forgotten, and through which cooperation can be strengthened and European values – e.g. effective multilateralism – may be projected in the system without making reference to a rivalry/friendship dichotomy.<sup>37</sup> In this context, one of the important aspects that I point out in the following chapters is how – despite the presence of a relevant gap of values – some relationships have been experiencing a positive development, and how despite the closeness regarding values the EU-Brazil relationship, for example, does not show substantial signs of progress.

Hence, the best way to approach the dimension of meaning and understand the use of ‘strategic partnership’ is to look at its use in individual cases. Through an analysis of the uses of this term in different cases, it may be possible to have access to the specific relational linguistic contexts in which this new expression has been introduced. Furthermore, it may be possible to discuss the intention of the actors when they use this language, the values and ideas – shared or not – on which this speech act is based, the micro and macro contexts in which this strategy becomes possible and the consequences of its implementation for the framework and dynamics of the relationships defined as such. My next step is to discuss where ‘strategic partnership’ is positioned in the broad context of the European Union foreign policy framework. This discussion is an important precondition for my analysis of ‘strategic partnerships’ established by the EU and each one of the BRIC countries in subsequent chapters.

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<sup>37</sup> In the next chapter I argue that this logic matches the notion of ‘structural foreign policy’ developed by Keukeleire (2003).

## 4 The European Union Foreign Policy and the Functions of ‘Strategic Partnership’

In the last chapter I made a general discussion on the uses of ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics. I argued that the goal of the present thesis is not to define the basic elements of ‘strategic partnership’ as a fixed form of association in international politics, but to address the different meanings and functions associated with the use of this expression in international politics. In Chapters 1 and 2 some theoretical assumptions were presented, which sustain a theoretical framework for assessing ‘strategic partnership’ on the level of interaction between international political actors and on another level of systemic foreign policy conceptualization.

In this chapter I will focus on this second level of analysis of ‘strategic partnership’. I focus on the EU’s framework of conceptualization for a ‘strategic partnership’. I argue that more than a random expression used by EU representatives, ‘strategic partnership’ is turning into a EU foreign policy concept. I argue that the use of this term to frame some particular cooperative associations is related to this actor’s self-understanding as a ‘norm entrepreneur’ and can be understood with reference to its ‘structural foreign policy’, especially with its normative goal of implementing ‘effective multilateralism’.

In spite of occasional signs of inconsistency concerning the use of some concepts by EU officials and in EU’s documents, I argue that ‘strategic partnership’ is a bilateral instrument to achieve not only bilateral but also systemic goals.<sup>38</sup> The EU’s strategic partners form a relevant group of actors with respect to the EU’s economic, political, security and normative interests. The way this strategic partner ‘label’ is assigned to specific partners and the different relationships that are constituted by means of this speech act show that the use of this term transcends the limits of bilateral interaction and become part of a broader foreign policy discourse with systemic implications. While the micro-level dimension will be explored further in the following chapters, this chapter places an emphasis on the EU as an actor with an external action capacity of its own and on how ‘strategic partnership’ can be taken as a normative diffusion mechanism of ‘effective multilateralism’ in the international society. Hence, I will explore the normative function of ‘strategic partnership’ within the contemporary EU foreign policy strategy by arguing that this function is associated with the nature of the EU as a

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<sup>38</sup> Gratius (2011b) calls attention to the EU’s foreign policy strategy of pursuing a multilateral agenda by means of bilateral strategic partnerships. The author argues that despite the strong discourse in favor of the consolidation of a multilateral order, the use of bilateral relationships for this purpose is a strategy that could only be successful in the long term.

normative international political actor and with the priority that the promotion of 'multilateralism' has in the European Union's external agenda.

The first part of this chapter will be dedicated to a discussion on the EU's foreign policy. The historical development of the EU's foreign policy and the existing clashes related to EU's member-states individual foreign policies will not be the focus of the section. Rather, the focus of the discussion is on the normative dimension of the foreign policy of the European Union. By emphasizing the norms, values and principles that sustain the foreign policy discourse of the EU, I discuss to what extent it could be argued that this actor is a 'normative power' that implements a 'structural foreign policy'.

In the second part, I deal with the status of the 'strategic partnership' category within the EU's complex list of forms of association with external actors. The main issues that will be handled in this section are: (a) who are the EU's strategic partners and (b) why does the employment of this new category of relationship fit the EU's foreign policy strategy? I argue that the establishment of 'strategic partnerships' by the EU is compatible with the pursuit of the diffusion of particular values and norms both on the interaction and systemic level.

Developing this discussion further, and making reference to what was discussed in the previous chapters, in the third section it will be called attention to the essential role of the 'strategic partnership' concept within the EU's foreign policy discourse as a discursive device which contributes not only to the image of the EU as main global actor in a multipolar world but also as normative core with capacity to influence politico-economic organization and social policy in the other regions of the world. In the final part of this chapter, some conclusions will be drawn which will support the analytical exercise that will be examined in the remaining chapters.

#### **4.1 The EU's Foreign Policy: Projecting the EU's Normative Power beyond its Boundaries**

Foreign policy is understood as those 'actions (broadly defined) taken by governments which are directed at the environment external to their state with the objective of sustaining or changing that environment in some way' (White, 2004, p. 11). This formulation refers to the foreign policy of states but as a general understanding it could be applied to a different political actor like the EU.

However, White (2004, p. 13) claims that the label 'EU foreign policy' is too restrictive and that the best term to address the EU's external actions is 'European foreign policy'. In his view, the latter takes into consideration the *sui generis* nature of the EU's actorhood without

ignoring the independent status of individual member states' foreign policies in relation to the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the Union.

In fact, some clarifications should be made to stress the different levels on which foreign policy takes place within the boundaries of the EU, but the use of the expression 'European foreign policy' is in any case problematic. The boundaries of the European Union do not match the boundaries of Europe as a geographical territory, and a concept is needed which makes reference exactly to the independent foreign policy of the European Union and of this actor only. Thus the term 'EU foreign policy' is more suitable for this project. Lucarelli (2006, p. 9) defined it as: 'the political actions that are regarded by external actors as "EU" actions and that can be considered the output of the Union's multilevel system of governance in foreign policy'.

The choice of this term does not neglect the relevance of member state's individual foreign policies, but instead emphasizes the supranational level of governance on which the EU's strategy of establishing 'strategic partnerships' is formulated. 'EU foreign policy', as presented by Lucarelli, takes into consideration the complex nature of foreign policy formulation within the boundaries of the EU while maintaining the focus on the Union's supranational foreign policy-making process conducted by the European Commission/European External Action Service and ratified by decisions of the European Council.

It cannot be denied that the current process of consolidation of the EU foreign policy is recent and derives from an intergovernmental European foreign policy approach. According to Hurd (1994, p. 421), cooperation among the EU's member-states aimed at building a common foreign policy began in the 1970s when the foreign ministers of the six member-states agreed on periodical meetings on foreign policy issues and a political committee of senior diplomats was established and put in charge of preparing for these meetings. Jørgensen (2004, p. 34) recalls that even if these dimensions of the 'common' foreign policy of the Union were of little importance at that initial moment, there was already in the early 1970s a security component via CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) and a defense component via WEU (Western European Union) in the European process of integration. In 1986 the Single European Act gave form and substance to the common foreign policy first steps by establishing the 'European Political Cooperation', which was later developed into title V of the Treaty on European Union establishing the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) (Hurd, 1994, p. 422).

The CFSP was conceived in 1993 as an intergovernmental unanimity-guided institution outside the supranational communitarian pillar of the European Union. From the beginning, it

was put in doubt given the low expectations that Member States would be able to develop a common foreign approach (Hurd, 1994). The Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) tried to solve existing problems and at least give a face to the CFSP through the creation of the High Representative for CFSP. CFSP's ability to homogenize opinions and create a common foreign policy discourse kept being discredited though (Peterson, 1998). In 1999, the Cologne European Council tried to propel the defense component of the European Union with the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Meanwhile, the European Commission progressively assumed an ever more relevant role as an independent international political actor and as the real face of a supranational foreign representation of the EU. That certainly did not lead to a single and common foreign policy discourse. Cases like the 2008 Kosovo's declaration of independence showed the lack of consensus among member states' on foreign policy issues. But despite the absence of coordination between a European foreign policy discourse and the discourse of individual member states, new efforts were made to give more projection to the EU foreign policy.

The Treaty of Lisbon (2009) maintained the intergovernmental CFSP and renamed the ESDP as Common and Security Defence Policy (CSDP). However, the High Representative for CFSP was replaced by the new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in charge of a European External Action Service,<sup>39</sup> working in the former Delegations of the European Commission – renamed Delegations of the European Union. The High Representatives for FASP – firstly Lady Catherine Ashton and more recently Federica Mogherini – counts today with more than a hundred and thirty European representations to states and international organizations all over the world. Currently, the European Union displays a formal independent and supranational dimension to its external representation, in accordance to the international legal personality acquired by the EU after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. Hence, after a long process it has been established a *de facto* EU foreign policy, which cannot be completely dissociated from the foreign policies of individual member-states but represents the agenda of the 'EU' as an independent political actor. At this point, a brief clarification about the classification of the EU as an actor is necessary.

There is a broad discussion on the EU's 'actorness'. Because of its *sui generis* nature, there are many approaches to how the EU is understood, e.g. a political system (Hix, 1999), a polity with different levels of governance (Rosamond, 2000), an actor that expresses late

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<sup>39</sup> The European External Action Service was constituted as a body within the Common Foreign and Security Policy but the officer in charge of this diplomatic apparatus – the High Representative for FASP – is also one of the Vice-Presidents of the European Commission.

sovereignty (Walker, 2003), a neo-medieval empire (Zielonka, 2006), a hybrid polity (Manners, 2006). Although this discussion is not the subject of this thesis, it should be explained how I understand the European Union as an international actor.

The EU has some degree of sovereignty of its own and is recognized as a subject of international law, capable of signing treaties invested with juridical value with other subjects of international law. In this context, it is capable of establishing 'strategic partnerships' as a single actor with extra-communitarian state actors. However, the EU is also a union of sovereign states and, thus, it has to manage intergovernmental and supranational competencies.

Walker (2003) argues that the fact that state actors yield another political or technical organization their sovereign prerogative in some areas of competence demonstrates the move of these states towards a new beyond-modern conception of sovereignty. The author argues that the EU manifests a late sovereign condition that overcomes modern sovereignty. This is the reason why the actors engaged in 'strategic partnerships' have been addressed so far as 'international political actors'. It is a terminology that allows the discussion to approach 'strategic partnership' as a language for cooperation not only between states, including also a late sovereign actor like the EU.

That does not mean that Walker's approach is taken as the single correct approach concerning the EU's actorness. All of the above mentioned approaches regarding EU's actorness are reasonable in the sense that they provide different analytical frameworks to assess the EU as an international political actor. In the end the most important conclusion that can be drawn from all these different names for the EU 'beast' is that the EU is a *sui generis* and extremely complex international political actor. It stands out in the international system not only because it has a sovereign capacity of its own, but also due to the fact that it is a more prominent international political actor than most states. The EU is not just another unity in the system, it is a global player capable of setting the international agenda. It is an actor that lives the dilemmas associated with the intergovernmental/supranational dichotomy but that has an agenda of its own, and is looking for the implementation of a strategy that will allow it to pursue its pragmatic and normative interests. In addition, and this must be underscored, it is an actor whose foreign policy discourse projects the idea of an actor eager to assume responsibility for the development of a more cooperative and stable international society.

In the European Security Strategy (2003) this claim was very clear. The document argued that '[a]n active and capable European Union would make an impact on a global scale. In doing so, it would contribute to an effective multilateral system leading to a fairer, safer and more united world.' This excerpt shows that the European Union was not only being developed



to stand out as a relevant external actor in the system, but also claims for itself a decisive role in the establishment of a new and ‘better’ system based on multilateralism. This emphasis placed by those EU representatives on the norm of ‘multilateralism’ has led to a discussion on the plausibility of seeing the EU as a normative power.

When Manners (2002, p. 252) discusses the concept of ‘normative power’, he argues that ‘the most important factor shaping the international role of the EU is not what it does or what it says, but what it is’. Sjørusen (2006b, p. 169) explains that this account derives from Duchêne’s conceptualization of the EU as a ‘civilian power’, in the sense that its ‘international role is linked to the “nature” of the polity itself’ and its ‘strength’ and ‘novelty’ ‘is based on its ability to extend its own model of ensuring stability and security through economic and political rather than military means’. She argues that Manners and other scholar’s further developed Duchêne’s argument by claiming that the EU is not only a different international actor due to its non-military nature – the ‘civilian’ nature – but also for its normative, civilizing and ethical posture in the system.

However, Sjørusen (2006b) calls attention to the criticism around this view of the EU as a normative power. She argues that it is not only based on the biased idea that the EU does ‘good’ in the system but also on an overlap with the way EU officials describe the EU’s international role, showing a lack of a critical standpoint from these analysts. Moreover, it must be said that even Manners (2006a) was critical about the use of the ‘normative power’ concept to address the EU and that new developments could, albeit not necessarily, ‘lead to the diminution of the EU’s normative power’ in the future.

Although these criticisms must be taken into account, Duchêne and Manners’ effort to link the EU’s systemic role, and consequently its foreign policy profile, with EU’s nature as a political entity is an important analytical step. In order to understand the basis of the EU’s foreign policy discourse and its normative emphasis it is necessary to point out that the EU (as an independent political actor) is the by-product of a process of integration originally designed as a mechanism to guarantee peace and stability in Europe. In addition, it is important to understand the role of liberal values and principles as the basis of the EU’s ‘actorness’. These values and principles can be found in EU official documents like the Lisbon Treaty and on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The Charter was put into force by the Lisbon Treaty. According to Manners (2002, p. 241), ‘[t]he principles of democracy, rule of law, social justice and respect for human rights were first made explicit in the 1973 Copenhagen Declaration on European identity, although the centrality of many of these norms was only constitutionalized in the TEU.’

In the Lisbon Treaty's preamble, the parties argue that they draw 'inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law.' These values are stressed and further extended in article 1a, which reads:

'[t]he Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.'

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union also mentions European values and principles. In this document 'human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity' are presented as the universal values on which the Union is founded whereas 'democracy' and 'the rule of law' are mentioned as principles.

Manners (2006b, p. 32) claims to have identified nine norms that are 'constitutive of the EU as a hybrid polity and as part of its international identity in world politics.' The nine norms are: 'peace', which he argues that is translated into the principle of 'sustainable peace'; 'liberty', taken as 'freedom within a social context', whose interpretation by the EU is according to the author the principle of 'social liberty'; 'democracy', more specifically 'consensual democracy'; 'human rights' ('associative human rights'); 'rule of law' ('supranational rule of law'); 'equality' ('inclusive equality'); 'solidarity', taken as 'the promotion of the social economy, the social partnership, and social justice within the EU, and in relations with the developing world' ('social solidarity'); 'sustainable development'; and 'good governance' (Manners, 2006b, pp. 33-38). The author argues that the first five norms mentioned are the 'core' EU norms, and the rest are the EU's 'minor' norms (Manners, 2002, p. 242).

Furthermore, the author (2006b) claims that the EU presents three self-images, each of which displays some of these norms and principles. The author argues (p. 40) that '*State* Europe has a tendency to promote a state-centric worldview often characterized by pluralist approaches towards the rest of the world'; '*Supranational* Europe has a tendency to promote regional integration as a worldview sometimes characterized by the prioritization of European concerns in relations with the rest of the world'; and '*Cosmopolitan* Europe has a tendency to promote globalism as a worldview that may be characterized by "the role of the European Union as a promoter of norms which displace the state as the centre of concern" (Manners 2002: 235-236).' Connecting values and principles with these three self-images, he argues that:

'EU values and principles such as democracy, liberty, and equality are to be found in the common practices of the EU member states. EU values and principles such as peace are to be found in the supranational practices of the Union itself. EU values and practices such as human rights, sustainable development, and social solidarity are to be found in the cosmopolitan practices of the EU hybrid polity

in world politics. Finally, EU values and principles such as the rule of law and good governance are to be found in the combination and interaction of these three EU self-images – state, supranational and cosmopolitan.’

This analytical correspondence of values and self-images proposed by the author is rather superficial. All the values and principles identified by the author are to some extent a constitutive element in the different self-images of the EU. Moreover, it should be pointed out that Manners (2002) confuses values and principles with norms. I understand norms as ‘shared expectations about appropriate behavior held by a collectivity of actors’ (Checkel, 1999, p. 83). They are thus connected to the idea of ‘oughtness’/‘appropriateness’ and may either ‘order and constrain behavior’ or ‘create new actors, interests, or categories of action’ (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, p. 891). Most of the ‘norms’ presented by Manners – e.g. human rights – are not norms, but values and principles. That does not mean that these values and principles are not important, but they have different roles in the implementation of the EU foreign policy discourse. As I will later show, a discourse based on values like ‘democracy’ and ‘equality’ will be the basis of a process of consolidation of a particular norm – multilateralism – in the system.

Regardless of this confusion, I concur with Manners in his observation that the EU adopts a messianic discourse. The Laeken Declaration (2001), for example, says:

‘[w]hat is Europe’s role in this changed world? Does Europe not, now that is finally unified, have a leading role to play in a new world order, that of a power able both to play a stabilising role worldwide and to point the way ahead for many countries and peoples? Europe as the continent of humane values, the Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, the French Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall; the continent of liberty, solidarity and above all diversity, meaning respect for others’ languages, cultures and traditions. The European Union’s one boundary is democracy and human rights. (...) Now that the Cold War is over and we are living in a globalised, yet also highly fragmented world, Europe needs to shoulder its responsibilities in the governance of globalisation. The role it has to play is that of a power resolutely doing battle against all violence, all terror and all fanaticism, but which also does not turn a blind eye to the world’s heartrending injustices. In short, a power wanting to change the course of world affairs in such a way as to benefit not just the rich countries but also the poorest.’<sup>41</sup>

In this quote the values referred to above are evident, but also how these values translate into a self-image of the Union as the source and the ‘keeper’ of what is morally appropriate in the international system. This is the foundation of the EU foreign policy and constrains the EU’s approach to its foreign partners, as it can be observed in article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty:

‘[i]n its relations with the wider world, the Union shall uphold and promote its values and interests and contribute to the protection of its citizens. It shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter.’

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<sup>41</sup> Lucarelli also quotes parts of these extracts (2006, p. 3).

Hence, Lucarelli's assessment (2006, p. 3) is appropriate when she argues that the EU differentiates itself from states for assigning itself two functions: to act externally for the stabilization of world politics and to do so inspired by some sort of 'ethics of responsibility'. In fact, the concept of 'normative power' is still applicable to the EU's foreign policy discourse if one takes into consideration how values, principles and norms shape the external action of this global player.

According to Manners (2002, p. 252) there are three dimensions related to the application of the idea of 'normative power to the EU': an 'ontological' dimension related to the fact that the EU 'can be *conceptualized* as a changer of norms in the international system', a 'positivist' dimension related to the fact that 'the EU *acts* to change norms in the international system', and a *de facto* 'normative' dimension related to the fact that 'the EU *should* act to extend its norms into the international system.' All these dimensions are important in the context of the present thesis. The fact that the EU foreign policy is framed in a way to promote a change of norms in the system and it really acts according to this motivation show evidence of the normative character of EU foreign policy.

Nevertheless, some authors criticize this normative nature of the EU foreign policy. Bickerton (2011) argues that one way to understand the EU foreign policy is to see it as an instrument through which individual member-states can be 'active without having to fully take up their responsibilities as major powers in the international order' (Bickerton, 2011, p. 9). However, this is a cynical and limited view of EU foreign policy. The foreign policies of individual member states cannot be taken as the core of the EU foreign policy. They are certainly connected to it in this extremely intricate system which links state, intergovernmental and supranational foreign representations, but they are just one element that structures the EU foreign policy. In addition, the EU foreign policy cannot be simply defined as an instrument of the member-states to act irresponsibly in the international realm. This argument neglects the ethical basis that sustains both the EU and member-states' foreign policies. Both the EU and its member-states are founded on a set of values and principles that are translated into an ethically oriented foreign policy.

That does not mean that the EU is merely an altruist and good actor in a Manichaeist world. Xinning (2011, p. 317) argues that the EU's preference for multilateralism and for being ethically conscious 'is not only a matter of ideological preference but also due to its lack of capabilities in international politics and security'. In fact, it is not my intention to claim that the EU does not instrumentalize its normative foreign policy discourse. However, the strong and frequent self-references in documents like the *European Security Strategy* and the *Report on*

*the Implementation of the European Security Strategy* in which EU officials stress the ethical foundation that moves the EU foreign policy and the belief that the EU is a ‘force for good’ suggest that this ‘ideological’ and ‘messianic’ posture is an essential constitutive part of its foreign policy discourse. It is certainly impossible to discuss in terms of counterfactuals. Maybe if the EU had a stronger ‘high politics’ capacity, the normative emphasis of its foreign policy discourse would reach a different degree. Regardless of the EU’s power capacity, it considers itself a force for good, demonstrating the strength of ‘ethical responsibility’ as a constitutive element of this actor’s identity and foreign policy.<sup>42</sup>

In the face of a foreign policy discourse characterized by a focus on values, principles and norms, a possible way to analytically frame the foreign policy of the EU is through the idea of ‘structural foreign policy’. Lucarelli (2006) incorporates Keukeleire’s concept of ‘structural foreign policy’ to address the EU’s external action, which, according to the author, transcends traditional foreign policy. Developing his argument about normative power, Keukeleire argues that the EU’s ‘structural’ foreign policy transcends the conventional foreign policy conducted by states because it ‘aims at influencing in an enduring and sustainable way the relatively permanent frameworks within which states relate to each other, relate to people, or relate to corporate enterprises or other actors, through the influence of the choice of the game as well as the rules of the game’ (Keukeleire, 2002, p. 14, apud, Lucarelli, 2006, p. 6). The author (Keukeleire, 2003, p. 44) argues that under the CFSP regime the traditional diplomacy of the member-states continued to be preponderant over a limited ‘common’ diplomacy of the Union. On the other hand, the author argues that the European Commission has ‘played a crucial role in the conceptualization and development of the EU’s structural foreign policy’ (Keukeleire, 2003, p. 50). For Keukeleire, the Commission was the institution responsible for providing the strategic direction that the intergovernmental CFSP had not been able to provide within the EU’s external action. By means of strategies and partnerships with third countries, the EU was able to establish itself as a relevant actor in different regions and build a more consistent EU common global approach.

In addition, according to the author, the European Commission implemented a ‘structural foreign policy’ because, by means of its foreign policy discourse, it aimed at the ‘transferral – in varying degrees – of various ideological and governing principles that characterize the political, social, economic, and interstate system of the EU’. For Keukeleire,

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<sup>42</sup> The fact that EU documents like the European Security Strategy (2003) mention the EU and the US as this force for good cannot be ignored. This statement is very meaningful, as it shows how the EU sees itself and the US as the real norm “keepers” in the multilateral world it is trying to shape.

strategies and partnerships towards third-countries and regions enabled the EU to work towards the implementation of long-term goals aimed at improving the situation of these partners and regions and their inter-state relations (Keukeleire, 2003, pp. 46-47).

Thus, Keukeleire's idea of structural foreign policy is the channel through which the normative power of the European Union is expressed and put into practice in the global international society. But, it is necessary to discuss further the instruments through which this structural foreign policy is implemented, i.e. how the EU diffuses values, principles and norms in a way that it promotes change in the system. Manners (2002, pp. 244-245) argues that EU's normative power is connected to six diffusion mechanisms: *contagion* – 'unintentional diffusion of ideas from the EU to other political actors' –, *informational diffusion* – 'the result of the range of strategic communications, such as new policy initiatives by the EU, and declaratory communications, such as initiatives from the presidency of the EU or the president of the Commission' –, *procedural diffusion* – 'involves the institutionalization of a relationship between the EU and a third party, such as an inter-regional co-operation agreement, membership of an international organization or enlargement of the EU itself' –, *transference* – 'when the EU exchanges goods, trade, aid or technical assistance with third parties through largely substantive or financial means' –, *overt diffusion* – 'as a result of the physical presence of the EU in third states and international organizations' – and *cultural filter* – 'affects the impact of international norms and political learning in third states and organizations leading to learning, adaptation or rejection of norms' being 'based on the interplay between the construction of knowledge and the creation of social and political identity by the subjects of norm diffusion'. The author (2006a, p. 184) stresses the fact that this diffusion mechanisms show the 'relative absence of physical force in the imposition of norms', another argument for the legitimacy of the 'normative power' label. By using the categories listed by Manners, it could be argued that the act of establishing a 'strategic partnership' could be seen as a mechanism of procedural diffusion. However, all the six mechanisms are to some extent present in relationships framed by this terminology. If one observes the dynamics created by some EU 'strategic partnerships', it is clear that all these mechanisms can be found in the initiatives that structure relationships defined as such, and shows the normative dimension of EU foreign policy.

Keukeleire (2003) did not present a categorization of the instruments of EU's structural foreign policy. However, the author distinguished on the one hand the economic and financial instruments of the communitarian pillar used as an exchange currency or as incentive to reforms in third countries, and on the other diplomatic and political instruments. The author emphasized

the specific role of the political dialogue for the implementation of a structural foreign policy, but also acknowledged the centrality of economic and financial instruments for the positive results of initiatives of that nature. He stressed that political dialogue faces difficulties in cases where military instruments are needed, showing how this structural foreign policy is attached to the material capabilities of the Union, and how the EU's foreign policy loses its capacity of influence and normative diffusion when it must be sustained by resources that are not as available as EU's economic and financial instruments. In this context, Keukeleire's argument is interesting because it is based on the idea that even normative power needs to be sustained by material capabilities. In addition, also important is the fact that the author addresses specifically 'the various partnerships' of the EU as one of the diplomatic and political instruments on which the structural foreign policy is sustained.

Both Manners and Keukeleire present an interesting account to explain the elements through which the EU's normative/structural foreign policy is put into practice. Both authors argue that some mechanisms are used to sustain a foreign policy that is used as an instrument to achieve normative goals and promote structural change in the international system. Nevertheless, I argue that another way to analytically frame the incorporation of 'strategic partnership' into the foreign policy vocabulary of the European Union is to take the EU as an actor that sees itself as a 'norm entrepreneur'. Therein reference is made particularly to Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) model of life cycle of norms. This very simple model of normative diffusion seems very appropriate to analyze how 'strategic partnership' fits the strategy of consolidation of a EU structural foreign policy and why the EU establishes strategic partnerships with a particular group of state actors.

According to Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), international norms live a cycle divided into three steps; 'norm emergence', 'norm cascade' and 'internalization'. In the first stage the norm emerges and so-called 'norm entrepreneurs' try to convince a critical mass of states – so-called 'norm leaders' – to accept the norm. In the stage of norm cascade, by means of a process of imitation, norm leaders try to convince other states to become norm followers. It is an 'active process of international socialization to induce norm breakers to become norm followers' (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, p. 902). Finally, in the last stage, the norm is internalized and is not questioned in public debate. If the normative structural function of 'strategic partnership' is analyzed in these terms, it could be said that the EU perceives itself as a 'norm entrepreneur' and its strategic partners a 'critical mass of states' that need convincing but that have an essential role in the following process of norm cascade and systemic change.

As I argued in previous chapters, ‘strategic partnership’ must be approached as a twofold international political phenomenon. The normative function of ‘strategic partnership’ expresses a micro and a macro component and the life cycle model of norm diffusion can be used as a heuristic device to explain the structural dimension of the use of this language. It does not explain in which terms each particular bilateral relationship is constituted as a ‘strategic partnership’, but it is a valuable analytical model to frame the establishment of a structural foreign policy strategy aimed at promoting change on the systemic level. If one looks at the state actors that are named as the EU’s strategic partners, one sees that they are linked to the notion of ‘critical mass of states’. If the EU wishes to keep the position of normative core in the system and intends to project a particular set of values, principles and norms in the system, the countries which have been labeled as strategic partners are those that must be transformed into norm leaders in the process of norm emergence. As long as these countries are not successfully convinced, and internalize the norm setting advanced by the EU, the process of norm cascade and successful systemic change will be incomplete. Hence, it may be said that the EU’s foreign policy has a structural nature, but this normative macro dimension cannot be implemented by the EU on its own. Any project of systemic change must be supported by a representative collectivity of unities in the system and it can be argued that through its bilateral ‘strategic partnerships’ the EU is trying to consolidate a stronger multilateral international system.<sup>43</sup> Therein, it can be observed how the level of interaction is connected with the structural level when the EU’s strategic partnerships are discussed.

There is a structural dimension in the EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’. These bilateral relationships constitute a framework of action of the EU in the international system. In this context, they are part of a foreign policy strategy that presents signs of coherence. There are also signs that point in the opposite direction. In the following section, I analyze the EU’s macro strategy of establishing ‘strategic partnerships’ in more depth.

#### **4.2 A Foreign Policy Strategy based on the Concept of ‘Strategic Partnership’**

The use of ‘strategic partnership’ by the European Union is a blurry subject. As I already mentioned, ‘strategic partnership’ is just one of many terms of cooperative relationships used by the EU to address its foreign interlocutors. The employment of this term is not random

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<sup>43</sup> In *Can EU Strategic Partnerships deepen multilateralism?* Gratius (2011b) also argues that the EU’s strategic partnerships are conceived as an instrument to project EU’s global capabilities in the system and consolidate a multilateral order. Nevertheless, she argues that the EU’s strategy of strategic partnerships is far away from achieving this goal and that the EU should first of all focus on a real strengthening of bilateral ties with its strategic partners before an international order based on effective multilateralism successfully emerges.



though. The incorporation of ‘strategic partnership’ in the EU’s foreign policy discourse is connected to a particular set of foreign policy goals pursued by this actor. Hence, the problematization of the use of this term should clarify not only some important aspects about the EU foreign policy strategy but also about ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics in more general terms.

In fact, there is great amount of confusion regarding the establishment of ‘strategic partnerships’ by the EU. Neither analysts nor EU officials seem to agree on who qualifies as a strategic partner of the EU. As mentioned in the last chapter, documents like the *European Security Strategy* and the *Report* on the implementation of this strategy are not clear on this issue. Authors like Grevi (2010), Khandekar (2011) and Lessa (2010) provide conflicting lists of EU’s strategic partners. Interestingly, even the former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, had a personal opinion about the countries that should receive the status of EU strategic partner, which does not correspond entirely to the EU’s official position.

During a presentation in an unofficial meeting between the High Representative and EU leaders and foreign ministers on 16 September 2010, Catherine Ashton listed Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa and the United States as the EU’s current strategic partners. She also suggested Egypt, Israel, Indonesia, Pakistan, Ukraine and South Korea as potential new strategic partners for the future<sup>44</sup>. This first list shows a conflict with the official status of these countries according to what is on EU’s official websites, in which only a limited number of partners are addressed as strategic partners.

When this project on the concept of ‘strategic partnership’ was initiated, a preliminary research of the expressions used by the EU with their foreign interlocutors was conducted. This list was elaborated before the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. The terms used on the EU’s Directorate-General for External Relations website – which was substituted after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty by the European External Action Service website – were observed with the following results. On the website of the Directorate-General for External Relations of the European Commission<sup>45</sup> 95 countries and territories with which the EU maintained some kind of bilateral relationship had been listed. On the web pages dedicated to 46 of these 95 countries and territories, the bilateral relationships with the EU were defined as simple ‘co-operation’. 19 of these 95 relationships (not including bilateral relationships not listed individually that integrated ‘regional partnerships’ of the EU) were defined as relations between

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<sup>44</sup> The episode is described by Rettmann (2010).

<sup>45</sup> <[http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/countries/index\\_en-htm](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/countries/index_en-htm)>, accessed 11 December 2009.

‘partners’, being 14 of these 19 ‘partnerships’ being framed by means of ‘partnership and co-operation agreements’. 27 countries had their relationship with the EU defined by other terms/instruments – e.g. ‘associate countries’, ‘candidates to membership’ and ‘potential candidates to membership’ –, were part of regional initiatives – e.g. the European Neighbourhood Policy –, or had already concluded closer economic relationships such as free trade agreements with the EU. In this preliminary observation of the terminology used in the DG Relex website only 4 countries were addressed as a ‘strategic partner’: Brazil, India, China and South Africa. Africa as a region was also labeled a ‘strategic partner’.

However, by expanding the analysis of the terminology used in official speeches and documents, it is clear the EU considers ‘strategic partnerships’ with countries such as Russia, Mexico, Canada, South Korea and Japan. As mentioned in the last chapter, despite being commonly recognized as an essential partner, the United States, was not addressed as a ‘strategic partner’.

Almost two years later, after replicating this research exercise on the EEAS’s website,<sup>46</sup> different results were obtained. Six countries were defined as a ‘strategic partner’: India, Brazil, China, South Africa, Canada and South Korea. By expanding the terminology used in official speeches and documents, Russia, Mexico and Japan were also included in the group of EU’s strategic partners. Contrary to Ashton’s informal list and as it was demonstrated in the last chapter, ‘strategic partnership’ was therein not used to address the United States. Although, as argued by Grevi (2010, p. 3), the US is ‘*the* essential strategic partner because of its unparalleled global influence; the tight web of political, security, economic and social connections that link it to Europe; and the normative affinity between the two partners’, officially this differentiation between the US and the official strategic partners was made, and the US was kept in a group of its own. However, this different status of the US-EU relationship was maintained only until the *Strategic Partners* Progress Report was presented to the European Council in December 2010. This report, which cannot be accessed through the website of the Council of the European Union,<sup>47</sup> focuses on the relations of the EU with three ‘Strategic Partners’: China, Russia and the United States. Although the US was not addressed as such in previous official documents and speeches and even on the website of the Delegation of the European Union to the United States, it seems that according to the presentation of Ashton mentioned above, the US is, in fact, one of the EU’s strategic partners. Interestingly, the report did not mention all of the EU’s strategic partners. It provided a brief analysis of the relationships with China, Russia and the

<sup>46</sup> <[http://www.eeas.europa.eu/countries/index\\_en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/countries/index_en.htm)>, accessed 18 September 2009.

<sup>47</sup> <<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/>>.

US and mentioned ‘other Strategic Partners (for instance India, Brazil, South Africa and possibly others)’. Thus, even if the simple observation of the status attributed to countries on official websites may be criticized as a legitimate source, the point is that there is no single official list that outlines the EU’s strategic partners.<sup>48</sup>

The conclusion is that it is extremely difficult to make any definitive assertion concerning the group of strategic partners of the EU. If one takes into account the results of the research on the EU’s websites, the research of joint statements and official declarations, and the organization of regular high level bilateral summits, it could be said that 9 states integrate the group of strategic partners of the EU (or 10 if we include the US<sup>49</sup>): Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa and South Korea.<sup>50</sup> However, the number is raised if non-state actors are taken into consideration. For example, the EEAS website states that the European Union has a ‘strategic partnership’ with the African continent and that the European Union has an interregional ‘strategic partnership’ with Latin American and the Caribbean. More interestingly NATO is always addressed as a strategic partner of the EU. Actually, in the *European Security Strategy*, individual states are not addressed as strategic partners (with the exception of Russia), being this status given only to NATO. In the document, it is argued that ‘[w]e need to pursue our objectives both through multilateral cooperation in international organizations and through partnerships with key actors’ but concerning NATO it is argued that ‘[t]he EU-NATO permanent arrangements in particular Berlin Plus, enhance the operational capability of the EU and provide the framework for the strategic partnership between the two organizations in crisis management’ and moreover that ‘[t]he EU and NATO must deepen their strategic partnership for better cooperation in crisis management’. The same is seen in the *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy*. The probable explanation for the use of these particular expressions is the fact that these are ‘security’-related documents, and the relationship with NATO must be differentiated from others. Nevertheless, the EU’s strategic partnerships are not called ‘strategic’ in the Lisbon Treaty either. Article 10A, in the section on ‘General Provisions on the Union’s External Action’, states that the EU shall ‘build

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<sup>48</sup> A series of meetings with senior officials from different directorate-generals of the European Commission and units of the European External Action Service between September 2013 and October 2014 showed different understandings from European officials about the criteria to define a strategic partner of the EU and also to define a fixed list of the EU’s strategic partners.

<sup>49</sup> I am still not sure if there is an orientation to address the US as a strategic partner only internally but not to use this language officially. Although the Strategic Partners Report defines the US as a strategic partner, the Presidency Conclusions mentions this report briefly and does not provide any considerations on this issue.

<sup>50</sup> I must stress that my list does not match Ashton’s list, since according to the EEAS’s website ‘EU and South Korea decided at their October 2010 summit to upgrade their relationship to a Strategic Partnership’ what makes me include this country in the list of strategic partners of the EU. The reason why Ashton did not do it is unclear.

partnerships with third countries, and international, regional or global organizations which share the principles referred to in the first subparagraph'.<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, however, differentiation is marked by the contrast between these 'partnerships' and 'special relationships' with the EU's 'neighbors', as it can be seen in article 7a: '1. The Union shall develop a special relationship with neighboring countries, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterized by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation.' It should be stressed that, as it has been said, 'partnerships', 'strategic partnerships', 'special relationships' etc, are all cooperative relationships, but the use of different expressions to define them have a function of demarcating contrast, differentiation and hierarchization and this function of 'strategic partnership' is also present when this expression is used by the EU.

In any case, the use of the term 'strategic partnership' by the European Union is confusing and shows a lack of clarity and objectivity that characterizes the EU foreign policy as a whole. Bendiek and Kramer (2009), for example, argue that the EU is missing pragmatism in its foreign policy. The authors claim that there is an inflation of the term 'strategic' and many of the relationships defined as such do not deserve this adjective. They argue that a strategic foreign policy should be based in well-organized planning. Interests and objectives should be pursued and presented as goals to be accomplished in a specific time frame. Furthermore, the authors argue that the use of the word 'strategic' and the strategic partnerships of the EU have as its single consequence the additional concentration of already existent policies. They doubt that through an intensification of the political dialogue, differences in the several 'strategic partnerships' may be overcome as a way to enable a harmonization of different worldviews in each case. This is yet to be seen though. Only time will tell if this strategy may be a successful move of the EU's structural foreign policy. In any case, it could at least be seen as an initial effort to consolidate a coherent common foreign policy of the EU.

Koehler (2010, p. 58) argues that '[c]oherence can be defined as a principle that guides foreign policy. In the case of the EU, coherence indicates, on the one hand, the degree of congruence between the external policies of the Member States and that of the EU (vertical direction) while, on the other hand, it refers to the level of internal coordination of EU policies (horizontal direction).' Furthermore, she argues that the Lisbon Treaty was an important step towards a restructuring of the EU's external relations, capable of bringing more coherence to

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<sup>51</sup> '(...) democracy, the rule of Law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international Law.'

it. The Treaty itself says that this is one of the goals of the EU: ‘[t]he Union shall ensure consistency between the different areas of its external action and between these and its other policies.’

Although the Lisbon Treaty does not solve all the coordination problems of the EU’s foreign policy, it implemented changes considered necessary for further work to be conducted towards a more coherent EU foreign policy approach. The High Representative for FASP and the EEAS are now in a better position to coordinate member-states’ foreign policy with the EU’s own strategy. In that context, the EU’s ‘strategic partnership’ based strategy is invested with a complementary capability. Countries like Russia are essential to a great extent for the pursuit of the EU’s internal and external interests. The EU cannot afford that member states and its own institutions behave in an uncoordinated way towards this kind of partners. Thus, the ‘strategic partnership’ label serves not only as a label of differentiation and hierarchization but also as a reference that a group of states are essential in the EU’s plans and must be addressed accordingly. The EU must take good care of its ‘strategic partnerships’ and cannot afford misbehavior or lack of coherence in its relationships with these actors. Moreover, if the EU wishes to fulfill its vocation as a norm entrepreneur, these strategic partners may be the key to a successful process of norm diffusion and systemic change.

Hitherto it has been claimed that the EU’s structural foreign policy is associated with a set of values and principles. However, the project of systemic change suggested by the European Union emphasizes a particular norm, that of ‘multilateralism’. The Treaty of Lisbon, for example, states that one of the goals of the EU’s common policies and actions is to ‘promote an international system based on stronger multilateral cooperation and good governance.’ This goal should not be underestimated. As already argued, and concurring with Keukeleire’s definition of structural foreign policy, it is one of the EU normative goals to reshape the balance of power distribution in the international system, to change the games and the rules of the games played in the international arena, and secure the EU’s position as a normative core in the system. This is an unveiled part of the EU’s foreign policy strategy, openly stated in documents of the European Commission like the communication *The European Union and the United Nations: The choice of multilateralism* (2003). The document declared that:

‘[t]wo aspects, in particular, of the EU’s contribution to the effectiveness of multilateral legal instruments and commitments established under UN auspices could be further developed. First, the EU’s ability to act as a **“front-runner”** in developing and implementing multilateral instruments and commitments. And second, **support, where necessary, for the capacity of other countries** to implement their multilateral commitments effectively.’<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Words in bold in the original text for emphasis.

Hence, according to this communication, the consolidation of a multilateral order is not the sole goal pursued by the EU. In the view of the European Commission, the EU must be the leading representative of multilateralism in the system, being the actor to push forward the development of an international multilateral framework and assure that other international political actors follow this path. In this context, it should be discussed to what extent the establishment by the EU of strategic partnerships with key-countries could be seen as part of a foreign policy strategy to assure the fulfillment of these multilateralist goals.

The above mentioned *Strategic Partners* report, delivered to the European Council in December 2010 makes clear reference to the EU's normative goals. It stressed the central position occupied by the diffusion of the norm of multilateralism in the EU's structural foreign policy and explained how the EU's 'strategic partnerships' might support this strategy:

'[b]eyond the bilateral aspects, it is of growing importance to explore how co-operation with our Strategic Partners can better underpin our aim of effective multilateralism, ie what EU and the Strategic Partners can do together on the global agenda, in the UN, the IFIs, the G20 but also with regional organizations. (...) Thus, the motto of Strategic Partners exercise is: fewer priorities, greater coherence, more results.'<sup>53</sup>

This citation is evidence that the establishment of 'strategic partnerships' by the EU is idealized as a new category of relationship that goes beyond the more immediate political and economic goals that can be achieved through deeper bilateral cooperation. It is part of a EU strategy to consolidate multilateralism in international politics.

This answers the initial question presented in the beginning of this chapter about the goals behind the introduction of 'strategic partnership' to the EU foreign policy discourse in the first place. To understand why EU officials see the necessity to incorporate a different foreign policy instrument/concept from association and stabilization agreements, partnership and cooperation agreements, free-trade agreements, potential candidates to membership, members of a Euro-Mediterranean partnership or countries included in a European Neighbourhood Policy, one has to look at the image that these officials have of the EU, its role and potential in international politics. This is consequently translated into an ambitious foreign policy discourse with a 'structural' component. In addition, it is also necessary to develop a particular approach to deal with other powerful actors in the system and connect them to the Union's agenda.

There are evident signs incoherence when the instrument applied lacks established criteria and is used in a way that diminishes its relevance,<sup>54</sup> but most of the EU's strategic

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<sup>53</sup> Words underlined in the original text for emphasis.

<sup>54</sup> I am critical of the way how 'strategic partnership' has been used by the EEAS. It is important to have in mind that if you create a label to differentiate your partners the more this label it is used, the more it loses its symbolical

partners are extremely prominent global players that, to varied degrees, also aim at projecting power beyond their borders. They are ‘ambitious’ international political actors in the sense that they use their foreign policy not only to pursue punctual goals associated with particular economic, political and/or military interests but also to pursue a higher hierarchical position in the international society. These actors share interests and even some values with the EU, but have an agenda of their own.

The existence of this ‘personal’ agenda is what motivates the EU to concentrate its efforts on the idea of ‘effective multilateralism’. A sustained multilateral order would dilute the concentration of power in the system – or at least decentralize the process of decision-making on the international level – while maintaining the EU at a central position. The EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’ are thus the foreign policy instrument designed to guarantee the status of the EU as the ‘front-runner’ in the management of the process of construction of a multilateral system. It is yet to be seen if the framing of ‘strategic partnerships’ will achieve this goal, but at the present moment it could at least be argued that it is a coherent foreign policy move.

Another question remains. It concerns how the EU pursues this normative goal through its ‘strategic partnerships’ with the consent of states which do not necessarily share the same values and principles cherished by the EU. How does the EU manage to advance this normative agenda without jeopardizing its relationships with countries that will be affected and are actually the target of this structural foreign policy? I suggest that this can be understood with a focus on the normative function of ‘strategic partnership’ taken as a speech act. Therein the analysis returns to the intercessional point between a macro and a micro dimension of the normative use of ‘strategic partnership’ within the EU’s foreign policy strategy.

### **4.3 Promoting Multilateralism through ‘Strategic Partnership’: the EU’s Pragmatic Move**

It was stated in the *European Security Strategy* (2003) that:

‘[i]n a world of global threats, global markets and global media, our security and prosperity increasingly depend on an effective multilateral system. The development of a stronger international society, well functioning international institutions and a rule-based international order is our objective.’

The European Union clearly presents itself as an actor with normative ambitions and capacity to contribute to the establishment of a stronger multilateral and rule-based international society. The EU’s foreign policy based on the development of ‘strategic partnerships’ matches

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meaning and becomes less attractive to others. By expanding the number of strategic partners of the EU, this instrument may lose its relevance as way to advance EU’s normative foreign policy.

this normative aspiration. A discussion on how this normative use of ‘strategic partnership’ is put into practice is necessary.

In the last chapter I argued that ‘strategic partnerships’ can frame relationships which cover diverse and multiple policy-areas. These bilateral engagements aim at strengthening political dialogue, economic cooperation, infrastructure projects, energy, security etc between actors that regard each other’s mutual support as an asset for the fulfillment of their interests. This is the use of ‘strategic partnership’ associated with the establishment or reconstitution of the terms of a bilateral cooperative relationship. This ‘constitutive’ use is the first and most basic function of this term in contemporary international politics and can be seen, for example, in joint efforts from the EU and Russia to negotiate on the liberalization of the Russian energy market. Most of the ‘strategic partnerships’ built by states seem to be constituted as relationships limited in their scope that cover specific projects or cooperation in specific policy-areas.

Nevertheless, if the relationship between the EU and Russia is taken as an example again, many analysts will argue that the employment of the term ‘strategic partnership’ is empty political rhetoric and does not contribute to the development of genuine cooperation. I will show in the following chapters that this empty rhetorical use is sometimes evident. Yet that does not mean that the presence of ‘strategic partnership’ in the speeches of officials is exclusively lip service. One of the central arguments of my thesis is that ‘strategic partnership’ is a language that has a performative character. It is used by international political actors to constitute the rules which will frame the bilateral engagement between ‘strategic partners’. By means of a speech act ‘strategic partnership’ is used to constitute and reconstitute the framework of engagement between strategic partners in terms of common goals and an common agenda, in terms of the dynamics between the partners – hierarchical symmetry or asymmetry between the parties –, and in terms of the reference to common values and concepts like ‘friendship’ and ‘rivalry’.

A second function of ‘strategic partnership’ is related to the use of this language as a label. Given the indetermination regarding how a ‘strategic partnership’ differentiates itself from other types of cooperative relationship, and given the ordinary connotation of the adjective ‘strategic’ as something or someone essential or extremely relevant, this language can be used to launch a new external relationship or jump-start those that are stagnated. It could be said, that in some cases both strategic partners benefit from the prestige of being in such a relationship with the other parties, but in some cases – e.g. the EU-Mexico ‘strategic partnership’ – there is clearly one part that benefits more.



The third and last function I identify is the normative use of ‘strategic partnership’. This use is probably not exclusive to the EU, but the analysis of the foreign policy discourse of this particular international political actor allows one to identify this third function of ‘strategic partnership’. In the last chapter the idea of ‘pragmatic move’ was presented but some considerations remain necessary on its connection to the EU goal to diffuse the norm of ‘multilateralism’.

As previously mentioned, the normative use of ‘strategic partnership’ benefits from the predisposition of the ‘strategic partner’-to-be to focus on the goal-oriented profile of the bilateral relationship. It is a fact that the European Union faces a dilemma in its relations with a particular group of states. On the one hand, cooperation with these partners is perceived as necessary in terms of security and economic goals. On the other hand, these partners share to a lesser extent or even ignore some core values, principles and norms promoted by the European Union, hindering the possibility of deeper cooperation. In this context, one may argue that the EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’ – taking into consideration the normative use of the term – are the foreign policy instrument created by EU officials to cope with these ‘challenging partners’.

By observing the relationship between the EU and countries like China and Russia, the dilemma between a programmatic and a normative agenda are clearly visible. ‘Strategic partnership’ is the conceptual framework to advance both components of the EU foreign policy. When ‘strategic partnership’ is the term used to frame these relationships, the focus is removed from the normative dimension of the relationship and put on the objective common goals of the parties. It could be argued that this language neutralizes the rivalry/friendship dichotomy that is much present in some relationships and allows the partners to intensify their cooperation and even broaden its scope. This intensified cooperation improves the channels of cooperation between both sides in the short term but, most importantly, it theoretically enables the development and consolidation of a process of exchange and socialization between the parties in the long term. Although the EU is not necessarily emphasizing the normative component of its foreign policy agenda, by means of its ‘strategic partnerships’ it finds a common ground to advance cooperation with these ‘challenging partners’ while keeping the political dialogue open. This is the opportunity the EU needs to try to transmit its liberal values and principles in these countries or even to convince the domestic political elites to internalize a particular set of international norms.

China, Russia and the other EU strategic partners are the critical mass of states that might help the EU to consolidate a multilateral order in the system. They are the states identified by the collectivity of actors in the system as the front runners of any significant process of norm

cascade. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, p. 905) argue that the mechanism of norm diffusion follows a functionalist logic and it could be said that the EU is putting this logic into practice in its strategy to internalize the norm of ‘multilateralism’ in the system. EU foreign policy-makers expect that the sustainment of frequent interactions – via ‘strategic partnerships’ – may ‘ultimately create predictability, stability, and habits of trust’ between the EU and these ‘critical states’. This would certainly have a specific impact on each of these bilateral relationships but it would also transcend the level of interaction and have a significant effect on the systemic level. This is structural foreign policy in the making. This is the EU trying to present itself as an interlocutor among all those state actors that are recognized as the core of the global international society and in this sense also an act of positioning of the EU foreign policy regarding individual partners and the whole collectivity that underpins this international society.

#### **4.4 ‘Strategic Partnership’ as a EU Foreign Policy Concept**

The focus of this chapter has been the normative function of ‘strategic partnership’. It was not my goal here to present EU as the only international political actor that uses ‘strategic partnership’ as a normative instrument. Nevertheless, the EU ‘strategic partnerships’ are used in this chapter, and indeed throughout the thesis, as a case study that enables a discussion on how ‘strategic partnership’ can be associated with the implementation of a foreign policy strategy aimed at the diffusion of values and norms in the global international society.

The academic literature on the EU has been used to support the claim that this actor is a *sui generis* unity in the system. The EU stands out not only due to the nature of its ‘actorness’ but because of the image it has of itself. The EU is the by-product of a process of integration based on liberal values and it feels morally obliged to expand and consolidate these values in the rest of the system. It is a matter of academic debate if the EU is, was or will remain a normative power, but there is an undeniable normative component in its foreign policy agenda. The EU wants to shape the system in accordance to its values and in this sense Keukeleire’s concept of ‘structural foreign policy’ is a valuable way to analytically approach the EU’s foreign policy discourse.

This discussion is relevant in a project about the uses of ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics because it allows one not only to approach the functions of this term in the international political discourse but also its ontological nature in international politics. The fact is that ‘strategic partnership’ is not only a general descriptive term within the EU foreign

policy framework. When EU officials attribute the label of ‘strategic partner’ to a state, it is not possible to immediately draw consequences about the basic characteristics of the relationship in case. That is not the case for other concepts like ‘free trade agreement’ for example. That is because in this case there is a fixed understanding of what a ‘free trade agreement’ entails and implies for the parties involved.

‘Strategic partnership’ is a term without a fixed meaning in international politics. Nevertheless, without stabilizing its meaning as a descriptive term, ‘strategic partnership’ is developing into a foreign policy concept by the European Union. It is just not a simple term in the foreign policy discourse of the European Union. Its use is not limited to the strategies designed to approach individual partners. There is a macro-structural dimension that associates the use of this term with the pursuit of a normative agenda. This macro-structural dimension is intertwined with the level of interaction though. As argued, ‘strategic partnership’ is a speech act through which international actors act in different manners, but the perlocutionary effects intended and achieved depend on an interaction of the micro and macro levels.

In this chapter, I presented the use of ‘strategic partnership’ as part of a broad foreign policy approach. In the following chapters I discuss how this language is used as a central element of foreign policy strategies designed to approach single countries. The aim of these analyses is to address the different functions of ‘strategic partnership’ that can be observed when particular empirical cases are discussed individually. By conducting four case-studies that involve the European Union, it will be shown that albeit its central role in the EU foreign policy strategy, ‘strategic partnership’ is used in different ways by this actor in its relationships with each individual partner. This apparent contradiction is fundamental for understanding the different ‘meanings’ and functions of ‘strategic partnership’ in the contemporary international political discourse. In Chapters 5 through 8 I apply the discussions of the previous chapters to provide a linguistic analysis of four of the EU’s strategic partnerships. After the discussion conducted on the present chapter on how ‘strategic partnership’ stands on the level of EU foreign policy conceptualization, it is time to focus on language games and processes, to return to the level of interaction and discuss the functions of ‘strategic partnership’ as a label, as a normative instrument and as a constitutive ‘speech act’.

## Part III

# Language and Analysis

## **5 The Russia-EU ‘Strategic Partnership’**

The last two chapters initiated a discussion on ‘strategic partnership’. Chapter 3 analyzed the uses of this term in international politics and Chapter 4 assessed the functions of this expression within the foreign policy of the European Union. Despite the necessity to examine the enunciation of ‘strategic partnership’ on a macro level of analysis, a discussion on the level of interaction serves to demonstrate the particular uses of this term in the EU’s bilateral relationships. In Chapters 5 to 8 I analyze the ‘strategic partnerships’ between the EU and Russia, Brazil, China and India with the aim to underline the different contexts in which ‘strategic partnership’ is enunciated and the different frameworks of bilateral engagement constituted through this concept. In this chapter I examine the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’. I argue that this term can be considered a speech act needing to prove itself constantly to an audience. Furthermore, I discuss the important constitutive and normative functions of this expression for the bilateral engagement between these international political actors.

Throughout the relationship between the EU and Russia there is a clash between a discourse on interdependence and a discourse on incompatibilities. In Chapter 3 I argued that most policy analyses on the EU-Russia relations in the 2000s focused on episodes of disagreement and conflict to give reasons in support of the ‘gap of values’ and incompatibilities between the parties that supposedly should hinder any sort of effective genuine cooperation. It is not my goal in this chapter to judge the pertinence of these assessments but to point out the strength of this discourse in the linguistic environment of this bilateral relationship. The ‘common ground’ of Cold War times seems very much alive in EU-Russia relations, especially in the diplomatic mind-set of some specific states. Every episode of disagreement feeds up this discourse and is taken by the audience as evidence that the EU and Russia are not meant to be partners. On the other hand, there are some voices – the stronger of them those of EU supranational institutions – that stress the necessity of an ever- deeper cooperation, the ‘positive interdependence’ and the good results that can be achieved through bilateral dialogue. And the term that represents this discourse and is used to support this claim is ‘strategic partnership.’

A look at the speeches of representatives of both Russia and the European Union show that ‘strategic partnership’ is a mantra constantly enunciated, which in good and bad times enables the parties to maintain a peaceful relationship and to discuss further initiatives of cooperation. It is a speech act that aims to convince the audience that Russia and the EU can

‘act as if’ something different from the discourse of incompatibilities were possible, and that if both parties keep saying that it is possible, eventually it will become true.

In a broader sense, ‘strategic partnership’ is the opposite of a discourse that would render a friendly relationship or at least cooperation between the EU and Russia impossible. Yet, it is more than the label of a discourse that says that cooperation is possible. It is also the term by which both sides try to frame the rules and limits of their bilateral relationship. That means that, in a historical perspective, ‘strategic partnership’ is used with different ‘meanings’. In different moments each party uses this expression to frame the bilateral relationship in terms of common goals, common values and hierarchy. And the dispute of these different ‘meanings’ proposed by the parties is one of the pillars of this chapter.

In this chapter, I show how ‘strategic partnership’ is used to constitute and reconstitute the terms of the bilateral relationship between Russia and the European Union. More specifically, it will be shown how ideas – e.g. ‘positive interdependence’ and ‘equality’–, metaphors – e.g. ‘the good friends’–, and dichotomies – e.g. ‘trust x distrust’, ‘convergence x divergence’ and ‘shared values and interests x incompatibilities’– permeate the linguistic environment of the EU-Russia relations and are used in the process of definition of the terms of their ‘strategic partnership’ and legitimization in front of an audience that a win-win relationship is possible.

The main section of this chapter is a historical overview and analysis of the EU-Russia relations with a specific focus on language. Starting with the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* (PCA), citations of the main documents that frame the bilateral relationship between Russia and the EU and of speeches and remarks made by their representatives until December 2012 are presented chronologically to discuss the use of the term ‘strategic partnership’ between these actors and the different language games constituted by them during this period. Following, the methodology of speech act theory and positioning theory, I present and analyze selected citations in a way to emphasize the quasi-dialogic process of exchange between the parties, in which language is used to frame the terms of the bilateral relationship and in which ‘strategic partnership’ acquires its meaning(s). Hence, the excerpts presented will show how the parties position and reposition themselves within the bilateral relationship, in which context ‘strategic partnership’ emerges as the framework of EU-Russia relations and how its use has a constitutive and normative effect in this relationship. I show that language and action are interrelated in the sense that some actions and events legitimize the use of this particular term whereas, at the same time, the use of ‘strategic partnership’ has important constitutive consequences that have an influence on agency. The second section is a discussion of two conflict episodes in this

period that show the constitutive impact of the discourse of ‘strategic partnership’ on EU-Russia relations. The First and Second Chechen Wars and the Georgian Five Day War will be analyzed in more detail to stress how episodes of crisis disturbed and shaped, albeit differently, the EU-Russia relationship. I then provide some concluding remarks in the final part of the chapter.

## 5.1 Framing a Russia-EU ‘Strategic Partnership’<sup>55</sup>

### 5.1.1 *The Constitution of an Asymmetrical Relationship based on European Values*

At the end of the Cold War, when Russia emerged as the heir of the Soviet Union, the relationship with Europe became a fundamental part of the Russian foreign policy. In the context of domestic political turmoil, Russia’s minister of foreign affairs, Andrey Kozyrev, advocated a clear pro-Western foreign policy. Russia’s transition to democracy and a market economy needed European support. It was certainly in Europe’s interest to overcome the Cold War rules of relationship and lead Russia towards the implementation of the necessary changes, which could enable economic cooperation and stability in the continent. It was in this context that the project of a *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* (PCA) came into existence (Corfu, 1994). The entry into force of the agreement was a long process due to disagreements regarding the first Chechen War, but was finally completed in 1997.

The PCA was the first bilateral document to give structure to EU-Russia relations after 1997. However, as Haukkala (2000) has pointed out, the EU had already developed its first strategy towards Russia in 1995, which corresponded to annex 8 of the Madrid European Council Presidency Conclusions (15-16 December 1995). In the *European Union’s Strategy for Future EU/Russia Relations* the EU highlighted its goal of encouraging ‘the progressive integration between Russia and a wider area of cooperation in Europe’. Although the term ‘strategic partnership’ was not yet used, the European Council stated in this document its commitment to establish ‘a *substantial partnership* with Russia in order to promote the democratic and economic reform process, to enhance the respect of human rights, to consolidate peace, stability and security in order to avoid new *dividing lines* in Europe and to achieve the full integration of Russia into the community of free and democratic nations’. In article 8, the European Council even affirmed that future European decisions related to Western security institutions, e.g. enlargement and transparency, should be addressed in way to avoid

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<sup>55</sup> This section is a further development of my analysis in *Parceria Estratégica: a linguagem que constitui as relações entre a Rússia e a União Européia* (2009). Some of the quotations and arguments made in this section can also be found in Chapters 4 and 5 of this previous master’s thesis.

misperceptions capable of jeopardizing the new cooperative relationship with Russia. This shows the effort of European leaders to make Russia feel welcome as a partner.

In the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* the term ‘strategic partnership’ was not used either. The terms employed in the document were ‘partnership’ and ‘cooperation’. In any case, this is still a fundamental document in the bilateral relationship between the EU and Russia, since it framed the basis of bilateral cooperation and reinforced the common interests of the parties to develop a strong cooperative relationship.

The preamble of the PCA pointed to ‘the importance of the historical links existing between the Community, its Member States and Russia and the common values that they share’ – a recurrent statement in the linguistic environment of this bilateral relationship – and the goal of ‘strengthening the political and economic freedoms which constitute the very basis of the partnership’. Article 1 is the most relevant clause in this document because it explains the scope of the interaction agreed by the parties in terms of ‘goals of the partnership’:

- ‘- to provide an appropriate framework for the *political dialogue* between the parties allowing the development of close relations between them in this field,
- to promote trade and investment and harmonious economic relations between the Parties based on the principles of market economy and so to foster sustainable development in the Parties,
- to strengthen political and economic freedoms,
- to support Russian efforts to consolidate its democracy and to develop its economy and to complete the transition into a market economy,
- to provide a basis for economic, social, financial and cultural cooperation founded on the principles of mutual advantage, mutual responsibility and mutual support,
- to promote activities of joint interest,
- to provide an appropriate framework for the gradual integration between Russia and a wider area of cooperation in Europe,
- to create the necessary conditions for the future establishment of a free trade area between the Community and Russia covering substantially all trade in goods between them, as well as conditions for bringing about freedom of establishment of companies, of cross-border trade in services and of capital movements.’

The idea of ‘partnership’ stated in the PCA was very ambitious, and aimed at developing a democratic and market-oriented Russia. A free trade area with this country was also mentioned. Notions like ‘cooperation’, ‘close relations’, ‘dialogue’, ‘joint interest’ and ‘mutual advantage’ certainly give the impression that both Russia and the EU saw the potential of a strengthened cooperative relationship. A subtle element in the text was the asymmetry of status of the partners. The document clearly shows that some of the goals agreed upon were meant to have Russia adapt to European values and political and economic systems. The main message communicated in the first article of this document is the fact that the European Union should help Russia to become more like Europe. This would bring the partners closer together and



generate advantages for both sides. One conclusion drawn from this is that although the term ‘strategic partnership’ was not used, the EU-Russia relationship was initially perceived as an asymmetrical relationship, one in which Russia was positioned as a country in need of help and direction and the European Union as the partner with resources and know-how to bring Russia to a more stable politico-economic situation. It could be argued that a strong directive component could be identified in the language used at this moment, i.e. that the EU was directing the path to be followed by Russia. Another clause of the PCA that is worth mentioning is article 6:

‘[a] regular political dialogue shall be established between the Parties which they intend to develop and intensify. It shall accompany and consolidate the rapprochement between the European Union and Russia, support the political and economic changes underway in Russia and contribute to the establishment of new forms of cooperation.’

In addition to the aspects of cooperation and asymmetry already mentioned, this fragment presents two important elements in the framing of the EU-Russia relations. The first relates to the relationship being conducted by means of political dialogue. This is a relevant aspect since regular meetings between the political leaderships of both sides were agreed upon as the main institutional channel to develop their relations, despite the emphasis on economic cooperation and even mutual dependence very much present during all the phases of the Euro-Russian relationship. The second element in this fragment is the idea of ‘rapprochement’, that is, the idea that during the Cold War Russia and Europe were kept apart, but from now on reconciliation is possible. This is important given that in the last two decades a discussion about the belonging of Russia to Europe could be observed in the speeches of political leaders on both sides. A discussion was also evident that revolved around how much stronger the relationship between the EU and Russia could be if there were not a ‘gap of values’ imposing a limit to cooperation and making episodes of disagreement be perceived as incompatibility. This was an idea already present in the PCA that is constantly present in the political debate.

A last clause of the PCA to be addressed is subsection 1 of article 99, which says that there is no impediment to one of the parties taking necessary measures to protect ‘essential security interests’. This point is underlined because both parties recognized that there could be divergences on some topics. That may sound irrelevant but taken into consideration the high number of analysis of the EU-Russia relations that overemphasize episodes of divergence as evidence of a doomed relationship and the very recurrent ‘convergence x divergence’ dichotomy permeating the different phases of the relationship between these international political actors, it is important to stress that since the beginning, before the bilateral relationship was even framed as a ‘strategic partnership’, divergence was seen as ordinary and acceptable

feature of EU-Russia relations. That means that despite an asymmetrical and directive relationship, their partnership was framed in terms that would enable the parties to defend their own interests beyond their 'shared interests'. This should not be neglected. Authors like Haukkala (2005, p. 7) argue that the relationship between the EU and Russia has been constituted in a way that 'norms equal the concrete "rules of the game" within the game that is based on (the assumption of) shared values'. This is only partially correct. In fact some values and norms are integrated into the constitutive framework of the relationship, but also agreed upon by the parties since the beginning was the possibility to disagree and sometimes not reach common views on particular issues.

In 1998, a different expression was used for the first time to frame the relationship between the EU and Russia. In article 111 of the presidency conclusions of the Vienna European Council (11-12 December) Russia was defined as a 'strategic partner' of the EU: '[t]he European Council had an in-depth discussion on the situation in Russia. It welcomes the Council's progress report on the development of a comprehensive EU policy towards Russia. It reaffirms Russia's importance as a strategic partner to the Union as demonstrated by the EU-Russia Summit in Vienna on 27 October.' In 1999, by means of article 78 of the Presidency Conclusions of the Cologne European Council (3-4 June 1999), the EU Member States agreed upon another strategy of the EU on Russia with the goal to 'strengthen the strategic partnership between Russia and the European Union, which is so crucial to maintaining peace and security in Europe and beyond and to meeting common European challenges'. In the *Common Strategy of the European Union on Russia*, in which the necessity of cooperation with Russia for the resolution of continental problems was restated, the EU 'welcome[d] Russia's return to its rightful place in the European family in a spirit of friendship, cooperation, fair accommodation of interests and of the foundations of shared values enshrined in the common heritage of European civilization'. In addition, the 'clear strategic goals' of the EU towards Russia were pointed out:

- '- a stable, open and pluralistic democracy in Russia, governed by the rule of Law and underpinning a prosperous market economy benefiting alike all the people of Russia and of the European Union;
- maintaining European stability, promoting global security and responding to the common challenges of the continent through intensified cooperation with Russia.'

The *Common Strategy of the European Union on Russia* thus showed again a directive character to EU-Russia relations. At least that was the kind of relationship the EU wished to develop with Russia. The problem with that framework was the possibility of its implementation. During the First and Second Chechen Wars, according to what has been established in the PCA, the EU's capability to interfere in the conflict was limited by the terms

of their partnership. Despite sanctions like the suspension of some PCA provisions and the transfer from part of TACIS (Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States) funds for humanitarian assistance after the beginning of the second war in 1999, the PCA was not enough to hinder Russia from taking measures to combat the rebels in a way that was perceived in Western Europe as being exaggerated. The European critiques based on human rights violations led to a political deterioration of the bilateral relationship and the beginning of a change in the language used to evaluate and understand the EU-Russia relations.

A relevant statement in this context was the speech made by Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), in Stockholm in October 1999, in which he stressed the meaning of the relationship with Russia to the EU and criticized the framework of the relationship agreed by the parties:

‘[d]eveloping the Partnership with Russia is the most important, the most urgent and the most challenging task that the European Union (EU) faces at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Building a partnership with Russia will not be easy, but I would argue most strongly that it is an opportunity we cannot afford to miss. This is why.

Firstly, Russia is a natural partner of the EU. (...) This trade with Russia is mutually beneficial. Russia and the EU need one another. (...)

Secondly, Russia is a country in transition towards democracy and market economy. It is strongly in our interest that this transition is successful so that we can live in harmony with Russia. (...)

Thirdly, we need to engage Russia in partnership for security reasons. Russia is a natural security partner for Europe – our security is indivisible. We cannot have a secure Europe without a secure Russia. (...)

[W]e must in future guard against thinking that we know best what Russia needs.’

In this speech Solana not only reaffirmed the necessity to build a cooperative relationship with Russia and the reforms the EU wanted to see implemented, he also stressed the difficulties that should be overcome in the process of constructing a partnership. Yet, the most important sentence in this fragment is the last one. Here Solana repositions both the EU and Russia. For the partnership to be achieved Russia should not be taken as a passive partner and the EU should not expect to impose the terms of the relationship. Solana contested the notion of an asymmetrical or unequal ‘strategic partnership’. And he would not be alone in this claim.

### ***5.1.2 Claims for Equality in the Bilateral Relationship***

The idea of a strong assertive Russia continually claiming the status of a great power is normally associated with Vladimir Putin’s terms as president of the country. However, signs of dissatisfaction from the Russian government about the relationship with its Western partners could be observed earlier. During the First Chechen War President Boris Yeltsin was emphatic

in stressing Russia's independence in face of European criticisms on how the situation was handled. However, a stronger demand about change in the terms of the relationship with the EU can be seen during the chaotic final part of the administration of Boris Yeltsin in *Russia's Middle Term Strategy towards the EU (2000-2010)*, launched in October 1999. Despite being launched two months before Putin's rise to power, and in a very complicated political context in Russia, in this document Russia clearly requested a new set of rules to regulate the relationship with the EU. Although the acknowledgement that the 'partnership and cooperation between Russia and the EU are priority tasks for the decade to come', article 1.1 explained the new terms of the 'strategic partnership', in which:

'Russia should retain its freedom to determine and implement its domestic and foreign policies. (...) [P]artnership with the EU can manifest itself into joint efforts to establish an effective collective security system in Europe on the basis of equality without dividing lines (...) in a high level of mutual confidence and cooperation in politics and economy.'

The emphasis on Russia's 'self-determination' and on 'equality' demonstrates an open opposition to how the EU-Russia relations had been hitherto conducted. Russia would keep playing the game according to which the parties would underline the necessity of cooperation in a continent without dividing lines, but assertively stressed that the relationship with the EU had to be changed into a partnership of equals. Another important part of the document was article 1.8, in which it was affirmed that '[o]n the basis of reciprocity and the existing potential, Russia could contribute to the solution of a number of problems facing the European Union, and to the strengthening of Europe's common position in the world.' Russia turned down the idea of a 'strategic partnership' if it meant that it were the partner in need of assistance and instead proposed a 'strategic partnership' in which it would also be in a position to assist a EU in need. This was an important act of repositioning. Gradually the terms of the EU-Russia 'strategic partnership' were being reformulated.

The Helsinki European Council on 10-11 December 1999 agreed on the *Declaration on Chechnya* in which Russian sovereignty and rights to fight terrorism were acknowledged but Russia was openly criticized by the lack of respect for human rights demonstrated in its incursions in the Chechen Republic. As mentioned above, the conflict led to European sanctions, but the criticisms present in the document were followed by a statement pointing out the relevance of the 'strategic partnership' with Russia found in article 8 of the declaration:

'Russia is a major partner for the European Union. The Union has constantly expressed its willingness to accompany Russia in its transition towards a modern and democratic state. But Russia must live up to its obligations if the strategic partnership is to be developed. The European Union does not want Russia to isolate herself from Europe.'

This article demonstrates that the EU believes it is in the position to criticize Russia for its behavior, and also implied that Russia's choices could isolate the country from Europe. In this document European leaders were telling the Yeltsin administration that Russia had the right to choose its path, but would have to deal with the consequences for the bilateral relationship. Russia is portrayed as a 'major partner', but this status did not guarantee the development of a 'strategic partnership'. Being a 'major partner' was not the same as being a 'strategic partner' and Russia's behavior was being perceived as incompatible with the idea of 'strategic partnership'. Through this declaration EU representatives tried to ascertain again its control within the 'strategic partnership' according to its own understanding of a relationship framed as such. Nevertheless, this understanding of 'strategic partnership' would be constantly put in doubt by the Russian leadership.

At the beginning of Putin's administration the assertiveness of his project for Russia was not as loudly pronounced as it would be in the following years. Some signs of Putin's ambitious plans were already visible in the first year of presidency. In an interview to the BBC program *BBC Breakfast with Frost* Putin talked briefly about his intentions for Russia: '[m]y position is that our country should be a strong, powerful state, a capable and effective state, in which both its citizens and all those who want to cooperate with Russia could feel comfortable and protected, could always feel in their own shoes – if you allow the expression – psychologically and morally, and well off.'

In June 2000 Putin approved the *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, a policy paper in which the recovery of Russia's great power status was made apparent and Russian foreign policy goals presented:

'[t]o ensure reliable security of the country, to preserve and strengthen its sovereignty and territorial integrity, to achieve firm and prestigious positions in the world community, most fully consistent with the interests of the Russian Federation as a great power, as one of the most influential centers of the modern world, and which are necessary for the growth of its political, economic, intellectual and spiritual potential'.

Concerning the EU, the document stated that:

'[o]f key importance are relations with the European Union (EU). The ongoing processes within the EU are having a growing impact on the dynamic of the situation in Europe. (...) Regarding these processes as an objective component of European development, Russia will seek the respect of its interests, including in the sphere of bilateral relations with individual EU member countries.'

The Russian Federation views the EU as one of its main political and economic partners and will strive to develop with it an intensive, stable and long-term cooperation devoid of expediency fluctuations.'

The document did not emphasize a claim to a relationship based on equality. On the contrary, what strikes the reader is the change of tone used in the language referencing EU-Russia relations. If compared to the beginning of the 1990s, when the relationship with Europe

was the top priority of the Russian foreign policy, this was a very significant move. The EU was identified to be ‘of key importance’ and the necessity of cooperation was reaffirmed, but given Russian ‘great power’ status, the EU was presented as only one of Russia’s main political and economic partners. This was an important assertive speech act by Putin’s administration. The idea of a strong Russia was used to change the general perception that the country was in a position of weakness, in which naturally a relationship with the European Union would mean an asymmetrical relationship. Therein Russia claimed its ‘rightful’ position within the bilateral relationship and immediately communicated the message that the game had definitely changed.

Summing up, the years 1999-2000 represent a moment of change in the terms of the EU-Russia relationship. There were even signs of a real change in practices. In the Joint Statement at the EU-Russia Summit on 29 May 2000, in Moscow, it was declared that ‘the EU wishes to promote an even closer convergence of interests with Russia and a higher level of stability and security in Europe as a whole. The EU reaffirmed that Russia may be invited to participate in future crisis management operations.’ This quote is relevant not only for its reference to the acknowledgement of the EU that more convergence is necessary, but also for the ‘concession’ that the EU was making concerning the possibility to invite Russia to take part in crisis management operation. Considering the above-mentioned clause of the PCA that underlined the different security interests of the parties, this was a very meaningful declaration. Nevertheless, this second phase in the ‘strategic partnership’ was still a transitional phase. Whereas Russia was starting to make some strong statements by means of official documents, other political declarations and speeches demonstrated some oscillation in their tone, some of them moderated and passive, and others strong and assertive.

### ***5.1.3 Russia Changes the Tone: Restructuration, ‘Common Values’ and New Common Initiatives***

On 23 March 2001, President Vladimir Putin participated in a meeting with EU Council members in Stockholm. His remarks in the press conference showed how Russia perceived the bilateral relationship. Concerning more general elements of the EU-Russia relations it can be said that Putin treated the EU representatives as ‘colleagues’, that he stressed the ‘cultural affinity’ and the ‘shared interests’ of both sides and highlighted that ‘mutual interests w[ould] contribute to the stability and economic prosperity of the continent’. The Russian president called attention to Russia’s economic dependence to the EU and the necessity of cooperation and an ‘open and constructive dialogue’. Some of Putin’s remarks were also more specific and

hinted to the rules that regulated the ‘strategic partnership’. On the one hand, Putin defended the Russian approach to the Chechen issue. On the other hand, two of his declarations revealed a very passive Russia. On the issue of EU enlargement, he affirmed that ‘our reaction is positive. There are problems, but they can be solved.’ The Russian president also declared that ‘[a]s for the European requirements of Russia, they have been summarized by Mr. Prodi. I consider them absolutely fair.’ These two declarations showed the moderated tone of Putin’s declarations at this moment. Regarding the EU’s enlargement, a relevant geopolitical and sensitive issue in Russia’s foreign policy considerations, the Russian president made a controlled and restrained statement. And in respect to the demands made by the EU to Russia in more general terms, he accepted them as ‘fair’, without any reference to Russia’s self-interests. Interestingly, Putin even stated that ‘the situation in Europe today is unique. All the European countries share democratic principles. We are no longer separated by ideological and foreign policy barriers. (...) we must use this unique opportunity to make Europe a model of civilized communication and effective pooling of efforts by our countries.’ This quote was not presented as a means to criticize or discuss the issue of democratic development in Russia, but to stress Putin’s claim about the importance of democratic principles in all Europe – Russia included – and the effort he made to highlight the proximity between Europe and Russia and the positive effects that the EU-Russia relationship could have as a model to the world.

The *Joint Statement* at the Moscow Russia-EU Summit on 17 May 2001 also presented some generally positive evaluations of EU-Russia relations. The parties stressed ‘the significance of our common cultural and historical heritage’, reaffirmed their ‘long-term strategic partnership, based on common values’ and underlined their ‘open and constructive dialogue’. I call attention, however, to a metaphor used in the statement concerning the city of Saint Petersburg. The city was cited as ‘Russia’s window to Europe’. Saint Petersburg is usually seen as the symbol of a modern and European Russia. Interestingly, after so many centuries since its foundation Saint Petersburg is still portrayed by the political leadership of both sides as just a window, a city that separates Russia from Europe. It allows Russia to see Europe from the distance, but is still in a way a city that demarcates two different socio-political entities. This metaphor was likely used as a compliment to the city and to its potential as bridge between Europe and the rest of Russia, but it shows its strength in the perception of the political leaders that, despite shared interests and cultural heritage, there are still important elements that separate Russia and Europe, that they have not so much internalized the idea of Europe without dividing lines.

In any case, in this joint statement the aims of the parties were expressed through the construction of a ‘long-term strategic partnership based on the principles of democracy, respect for human rights, rule of law and market economy. Our aim is to foster economic growth and prosperity, social development, a clean environment and strengthened security and stability in Europe, on the basis of shared values.’ They also stressed that ‘[f]reedom of speech and pluralism in the media are essential democratic principles and core values for a genuine EU-Russia partnership.’ But what strikes the reader in terms of the relationship framed by these declarations concerns the declarations on Russia’s accession to the World Trade Organization and on the ratification of the Energy Charter Treaty. It should be mentioned that this was a joint statement, in the sense that both sides in theory agreed with the content. Interestingly, they declared that ‘[t]he EU reiterates its support for Russia’s WTO accession and will continue to assist Russia in its adaptation to WTO requirements.’ Leaving aside the fact that only ten years after this declaration Russia has finally become a member of the WTO after a long and complicated process, this fragment reinforces the positioning of Russia as the one to be helped or assisted within the ‘strategic partnership’, despite the fact that Russia did not oppose the idea of cooperation on which the ‘strategic partnership’ was based. But the parties also stated that ‘[t]he ratification of the Energy Charter Treaty by Russia would help to create a more favourable environment for the support of International Financial Institutions and for international investments.’ At this moment Russia was compelled to adopt this discourse and argue in favor of the Energy Charter Treaty, even though it was not in its best interest. Some years later Putin rejected the ratification of this document. At the time, the Russian president was constrained to accept it. This shows the limit to Russian agency. Some months later, however, the Russian president would make a harsh claim for changes in the terms of the EU-Russia relations.

Echoing Russian dissatisfaction with how the bilateral relationship labeled as a ‘strategic partnership’ had been hitherto conducted, President Putin gave a speech in the German Federal Parliament on 25 September 2001 in which he stated Russia’s commitment to the development of ‘true cooperation and partnership’:

‘we have so far failed to recognize the changes that have happened in our world over the past ten years and continue to live in the old system of values: we are talking about partnership, but in reality we have not yet learned to trust each other (...) [t]here are barriers and obstacles on that road that we are surmount. However, if we leave aside objective problems and occasional ineptness of our own, we will see the beat of Russia’s strong, live heart. And this heart is open to true cooperation and partnership.’

This kind of speech could be understood as a declaration based on empty political rhetoric (Kuznetsova, 2005), one that does not represent Russia’s true commitment to genuine cooperation with Europe. Leaving aside references to the heart of Russia being open to a positive relationship with Europe, this fragment is important because Putin was calling the



public's attention to the strength of the Cold War 'common ground'. The necessity of cooperation and trust was constantly emphasized, and it was considered essential by the Russian president, but it was not given expression in the established framework of the EU-Russia relations. Suspicion and distrust, typical of a previous phase in the bilateral relationship, was still evident and hindered the possibility of 'true cooperation and partnership', which according to Putin could only be achieved by a real change of perspective towards the other.

At the Russia-EU Summit on 29 May 2002 in Moscow, a *Joint Declaration on further practical steps in developing political dialogue and cooperation on crisis management and security matters* was released. This was a short declaration, but one single fragment should be highlighted. In the document the parties declared that '[w]e will act together to strengthen security for all in a Europe whole and free recognizing the principle of indivisibility of security, thus ensuring peace and stability for present and future generations of Europeans.' The sentence not only echoed Solana's speech and the declarations on the indivisibility of Russian and European security interests, it did not separate Russia from Europe. It spoke generally about future generations of Europeans. Once again it can be identified as a speech act against the discourse of gaps of values that reinforced the boundaries between Russia and the EU.

In that context, the EU-Russia Summit in May 2003 launched a Joint Declaration in which four 'common spaces' were created in an effort to develop strategic goals in four areas: the common economic space; the common space of freedom security and justice; the common space of external security; and the common space of research and education including cultural aspects. As pointed out in the declaration, the creation of these four common spaces took place within the framework of the PCA and created a process of cooperation which 'will be approached in a systematic way and on equal footing, with specific targets and reciprocal arrangements in each space. It will be realized gradually and methodically.'

At this moment the relevance of developing a 'strategic partnership' was stressed in official speeches and declarations. In this context, the Russian government made an effort to try to show both the European and Russian audiences that Russia and Europe belonged together, in spite of the Chechen War and other bilateral problems. In an interview with the Euronews Channel in Avian (France) on 3 June, 2003, Vladimir Putin pushed his political rhetoric to its limit by arguing that: '[g]eographically, Europe reaches as far as the Ural Mountains, but in fact European culture exists in the space reaching Vladivostok on the Pacific Coast because the people who live there hardly differ in their mentality from those who live in Moscow or St Petersburg.'

It is important to point out that the discussion on common values was a relevant issue both in the Russian and in European contexts. It was taken as a fundamental issue for the legitimization of any possibility of genuine cooperation. The Presidency Conclusions of the December 2003 European Council, for example, declared that ‘[w]e should continue to work for closer relations with Russia, a major factor in our security and prosperity. Respect for common values will reinforce progress towards a strategic partnership.’ But whereas on the one hand declarations and initiatives like the Four Common Spaces led to the impression of a more balanced ‘strategic partnership’ between Russia and the EU, on the other hand there were still strong elements of divergence in the practical management of foreign policy issues. The status of Kosovo, the expansions of NATO and of the EU in 2003 and 2004, respectively, and the ‘colored revolutions’ in Georgia and in the Ukraine are examples of international issues on which Russia and the EU had divergent opinions, but examples in which Russia’s opinion was constantly ‘defeated’. Before the EU’s enlargement on 1 June 2004, Russia and the EU launched a joint statement on 27 April 2004 declaring that:

‘[t]he European Union and the Russian Federation acknowledge the opportunities to further strengthen their strategic partnership offered by the enlargement of the EU. (...) The interdependence of the EU and Russia, stemming from our proximity and increasing political, economic and cultural ties, will reach new levels with the enlargement of the EU. (...) EU enlargement will bring the EU and Russia closer together in a Europe without dividing lines, inter alia by creating a common space of freedom, security and justice.’

Despite its concerns with the enlargement, Russia took part again in a joint statement that stressed only the mutual beneficial consequences of the enlargement. The topic was certainly intensively negotiated by the parties and some concessions were made to Russia in terms of trade benefits, but again the impression regarding the ‘strategic partnership’ was that the EU was constantly winning the arm wrestling disputes with Russia. This was how the ‘strategic partnership’ was conducted at this moment.

In this context, a very illuminating document was disclosed, the *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on relations with Russia*. It was an important declaration because it reiterated the relevance of the ‘strategic partnership’, but, in turn, it was also a very critical evaluation of Russian efforts to contribute to the bilateral relationship and an open statement in favor of a scenario in which the EU must remain in control of further developments. In the document some positive general remarks can be found, e.g. statements on the necessity to strengthen ‘the strategic partnership between the EU and Russia and the respect of values on which it is based’ and remarks concerning ‘the well-being of Europe as a whole’, interests that ‘converge’, ‘the basis of reciprocity’ and the fact that ‘[c]ooperation should reflect the mutual interest of the EU and Russia and be balanced.’ A new

concept was also introduced in mentioning the ‘interest to engage and build a genuine strategic partnership on the basis of *positive interdependence*.’ But the overall evaluation of the Commission showed a high degree of dissatisfaction with Russia:

‘[r]elations have (...) come under increasing strain with divergence[.] (...) [R]eports by international organizations, (...) events in Chechnya and the indications of selective application of the law raise questions about Russia’s commitment and ability to uphold core universal and European values and pursue democratic reforms. (...) [D]espite common interests, growing economic interdependence and certain steps forward, there has been insufficient overall progress on substance. (...) Experience has shown that when difficult matters arise, Russia often seeks to treat questions by setting up negotiating mechanisms.’

Hence, the evaluation was very negative. Russia was represented as the party, which did not live up to its commitments, which was not able ‘to uphold core universal and *European* values’. Again, Russia’s ‘Europeanness’ was questioned. And a set of other fragments demonstrated how EU’s representatives believed they could improve the results of the ‘strategic partnership’:

‘[i]t is only via engagement, making full use of our combined negotiating strength, that the EU can promote a fully functioning rules-based system in Russia, to the benefit of both. (...) It is in the EU’s interest to seek an open, stable and democratic Russia, acting as a strategic partner which can uphold European values, continue reforms, implement commitments and, in cooperation with the EU, play a constructive role in the NIS [New Independent States]. (...) The EU should make full use of its influence with Russia to promote and defend EU interests and to ensure a balanced relationship. (...) The EU can influence developments in Russia. (...) The EU should be ready to discuss all matters with Russia and should not hesitate to defend EU interests vigorously.’

These assertions show clearly the kind of ‘strategic partnership’ the EU had in mind. It was a ‘strategic partnership’ in which the EU should impose a system of rules in Russia to the very own benefit of both of them. Thus the European Commission openly argued that it knew what was best for Russia. The EU also saw itself in a position to direct the ‘strategic partnership’ by using its influence to control developments not only within the bilateral relationship, but also in Russia. And despite the recurrent claims to mutual interests and convergence, in the end the EU vigorously defended its own interests. Interestingly, there was not any reference to concessions, only to how the EU should control and impose the terms of cooperation. And whereas involved parties stressed the importance of political dialogue as an essential element in the bilateral relationship, the Commission declared its wish to ‘engage with Russia to build a genuine strategic partnership, moving away from grand political declarations and establishing an issues-based strategy and agenda’. This last statement verified a sudden twist in the idea of ‘strategic partnership’ for the European Union. The EU did not agree with how the bilateral relationship had been conducted so far, it was not worried about just keeping the channel of communications open and promoting gradual convergence, it wanted results. This *Communication* was not addressed directly to Russia but to other EU’s institutions. However,

it was a document that suggested an idea of ‘strategic partnership’ that diverged from previous declarations, or at least assumed a much stronger tone.

That shows a visible lack of consistency in the European discourse. Take the declarations made some weeks later on the EU-Russia Summit in Moscow on 21 May 2004. In total contrast to the *Communication*, the Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern, who was holding the presidency of the European Council, stated that ‘the quality and tone of today’s discussion give my colleagues and myself certainty that relations between Russia and the EU have reached a new level of trust and commitment to cooperate in order to resolve the common economic and security problems that we face.’<sup>56</sup> Even more shocking was the declaration made by the president of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, who was then head of the same institution that elaborated the previous document, on EU-Russia relations since Vladimir Putin’s rise to power:

‘[t]hese five years really have been wonderful for our relations over my time as President. We have made vast improvements to and have intensified our relations, both in terms of quality and quantity. Today, Russia and the EU really are strategic partners and we share common aims not only in Europe but in the world. (...) EU enlargement, the common spaces, energy dialogue, accession to the WTO – together we have achieved much. But the greatest achievement is that Russia and the EU have become closer to each other. There is still a lot of practical work to be done but I am confident that we have built a solid foundation on which to develop our relations in the future.’<sup>57</sup>

After having made heavy critiques regarding Russia’s domestic and international politics, having pointed out the awful results of bilateral cooperation and criticized a relationship strongly based on grand political declarations, this was a curious way to address the developments of the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’. Therein it is difficult to separate empty rhetoric from genuine political intentions. In any case, this is the complicated linguistic environment, which informs and constitutes the bilateral relationship between Russia and the EU. It would not come as a surprise that Russia would insist in a change of the rules of the game.

The fifteenth EU-Russia summit, held in Moscow on 10 May 2005, was an important episode because on that occasion the parties agreed upon the roadmaps for the implementation of the four common spaces created in 2003. In the text of the roadmap for the common economic space it was reinforced the goal to establish ‘an open and integrated market between the EU and Russia’.<sup>58</sup> This roadmap, in line with previous declarations, also emphasized the existence of shared values between the EU and Russia. In addition, the roadmap for the common

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<sup>56</sup> President of Russia (Official Web Portal), *Press Conference following the Russia-European Union Summit*, 21 May 2004.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Council of the European Union (2005) 15th EU-Russia Summit: Road Maps [8799/05 ADD 1 (Presse 110)], Brussels, 11 May 2005.

space of external security stressed the necessity of constructing a Europe ‘without dividing lines’.<sup>59</sup> The roadmap for the common space of liberty, security and justice also pointed out some principles on which the development of this common space should be conducted:

- ‘ - equality between partners and mutual respect of interests;
- adherence to common values, notably to democracy and the rule of Law as well as to their transparent, and effective application by independent judicial systems;
- respect of human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, adherence to an effective implementation, in particular of United Nations (UN) and Council of Europe Conventions as well as related protocols and OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) commitments in this field;
- respect for an implementation of generally recognized principles and norms of international Law, including humanitarian provisions;
- respect for fundamental freedoms, including free and independent media.’<sup>60</sup>

These principles are explicitly mentioned because they show a degree of concession on the EU side. The EU openly recognized in an official document – not only in statements – a relationship framed on the idea of equality and the relevance of taking into consideration Russia’s individual interest. However, the document also shows how the EU was intending to push its interests forward, i.e. through Russia’s recognition of a set of normative principles. This shows that the internalization of these normative principles in the Russian political and legal order were also an essential goal of the establishment of a ‘strategic partnership’. The terms of the relationship were accounted for as changed, yet that did not mean that the discourse of cooperation and ‘strategic partnership’ could still be used to try to influence normative change in Russia. According to Haukkala (2005, pp. 16–17) the logic behind this policy move was that ‘as enforcement and sanctions have become unfeasible, it has been deemed better to develop the relationship in a pragmatic manner in hope of achieving some of the normative aims in the process’. It is actually the logic of the ‘pragmatic move I described in Chapter 4, which is based on Fierke’s (2002, 2007) ‘acting as if’.

It is important to note that the idea of ‘equality’ between Russia in the EU in their ‘strategic partnership’ was authorized and sustained by a discourse or official acknowledgement in documents or declarations. Russia’s claim to be repositioned as a partner on equal footing in the ‘strategic partnership’ was supported by a process of restoration of political pride and assertiveness, which derived from important internal developments in the country. Putin’s centralization initiatives that created the ‘power vertical’ and the economic recovery pushed by the rise of oil prices enabled a more cohesive and assertive foreign policy discourse and an

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

attempt at repositioning Russia not only in relation to the EU but also in relation to other great powers in the system. In that sense, this process of politico-economic restructuring was an important element of validation of claims regarding the reformulation of the terms of relationships with other international political actors and also of the 'strategic partnership' with the EU. However, this move did not mean that an equal partnership between Russia and the EU should necessarily lead to clash and stalemate followed by a degeneration of the cooperation initiatives.

In the joint press conference following the Russia-EU Summit in London on 4 October 2005 the president of the European Commission, Mr. Barroso, made reference to the relationship between Russia and the EU as 'two strategic partners, neighbours and friends'. In his remarks, Vladimir Putin made punctual reference to this statement and argued that '[w]hen President Barroso began his introductory remarks I noticed the good choice of words he used. He said that a dialogue is underway between strategic partners, neighbours and friends'. He also repeated the common statement about 'no dividing lines in Europe'. But the Russian president also addressed the issue regarding the new tone of Russian foreign policy and what it represented to the 'strategic partnership' with the EU:

'[t]he second point I wanted to make regards the question of whether we feel more assertive now as a result of the Russian economy's growth over recent years. Yes. ... Of course this situation creates favourable conditions for us to be able to pursue an independent foreign policy. This is naturally the case. (...) [But] now that our possibilities have increased considerably, we have no intention of putting on airs. We have every intention of engaging in dialogue on an equal footing with our partners and of looking for compromise solutions where we think it possible, taking into account that our European partners will also give consideration to our national interests.'

In this quote Putin openly stated that the situation had changed. The game played by Russia and the EU could not be the same as the one played in a moment of political and economic instability and weakness. That means that the rules of the game had to be adapted to a new reality in which Russia was repositioning itself in the many spheres of its foreign policy. That does not mean that the bilateral relationship with the EU could not be developed in terms of cooperation and even friendship. The reference to 'compromise solutions' proposed a shift from a hierarchy-based directive relationship to a compromise-based commitment between equals. The Russian president also emphasized that the country should be taken as a trustworthy partner: 'Russia is a reliable partner and even during the most difficult periods in its economic development it never let down its partners in Europe.' Taking into account the constant mistrust associated with Russia's foreign policy, Putin stressed that the country's pursue of a great power status should not be seen as a threat.

In this context, the Russian president also published an article on the importance of the partnership with the EU before the bilateral summit on 24 November 2006 in Helsinki. The title of the article was *Russia-EU partnership crucial for a united, prosperous Europe*. Despite seeing Russia in a stronger position to defend its interests in the international realm, Putin tried again to reinforce the positive features and potential good results of cooperative relations with the EU. Putin, as usual, made reference to ‘the historical and cultural traditions’ that connected the partners, claiming that ‘Russia [was] a natural member of the European family’. He asked for ‘an equitable strategic partnership, a partnership based on common aspirations and values’, in which, however, it would still be possible that the partners would have ‘tactical differences’. More interesting though, is that through the article Russia repositioned itself by employing a discourse which some years ago was part of the EU’s discourse:

‘Russia – a state with more than a thousand-year old history – has things to share with European partners. Including a unique experience in which various religions, ethnic groups and cultures coexist and mutually enrich one another. (...) Russia wants its largest neighbor to be stable and predictable and hopes that changes and expansion will not erode the EU’s uniform legal framework.’

As shown earlier, the discourse that characterized the first moments of the EU-Russia relations in the 1990s showed that the EU was worried about political developments in Russia. In this statement Putin suggests an inversion of this logic: it was now the stable Russia that was worrying about the EU, and it was Russia that could give the EU some valuable lessons. In the same way, Putin said that ‘the pace of development of our relations and their future depend largely on changes in the EU.’ This was another statement that contradicted what used to be said before. Some years before this statement, Russia was presented as ‘responsible’ for the positive or negative developments within the partnership. Putin reversed again the positions occupied by the EU and Russia: Russia was the stable partner, the EU the one that held back the possibility of positive results. And the Russian president kept the same posture in his remarks during the joint press conference that followed the Helsinki Russia-EU Summit:

‘I would like to express my regret that we were not able to start negotiations of a new fundamental Russia-EU agreement. The European Union has not yet developed a unified position on this issue. For its part, Russia confirms its readiness to start negotiations. (...) We will wait patiently for the moment when the EU agrees on a common position.’

Another important statement by the Russian president was ‘[t]hose who warn of the danger of Europe becoming dependent on Russia see Russia–EU relations in black and white and try to fit them into the obsolete mould of “friend or foe”’. This quote claimed that Russia should not be seen as a villain and that more intensive interdependent relations should not be viewed with suspicion. Putin offered an interesting reading of the clashing discourses that permeate the EU-Relations represented by the dichotomy ‘friend x enemy’. As I argued in the Chapters 3 and 4, the term ‘strategic partnership’ can be seen as an instrument to avoid the

framing of bilateral relations in these terms, and this is exactly what Putin was doing. He claimed that EU-Russia relations could not be reduced to this dichotomy. Yet things are not that ‘black and white’. The partners may try to show that they understand each other, that they are in a position to obtain positive results by means of cooperation, but the ‘strategic partnership’ allows some degree of divergence, ‘tactical differences’, and that was the kind of relationship that the parties had been constructing, one that took into account the complexities inherent in their relationship. That did not mean that a more friendly relationship could not become a positive outcome of the ‘strategic partnership’, but that the success of the relationship was threatened when the relationship was framed according to this dichotomous logic.

In this new linguistic context, the EU was ‘forced’ to change its discourse. On 29 November 2006 the European Commissioner for External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner reported on the Helsinki Summit at the European Parliament Plenary. She stated, for example, that ‘[o]n energy President Putin confirmed that the Energy Charter Treaty would not be ratified as it stands, but expressed readiness to come to a deal which respected the interests of both sides and included the principles of the ECT.’ It must be stressed that since the year 2000 the EU and Russia have agreed on an Energy Dialogue. During many years one of the main demands of the European Union was that Russia would ratify the *European Charter Treaty*. At this moment, however, Russia openly declared that it would not ratify the treaty. This decision was accepted by the EU. That was a Russian move that would not have been possible in the past without generating complaints on the European side, but it was a decision that Russia was able to sustain under the new terms of the ‘strategic partnership’.

These new terms of cooperation appeared to be in the interest of Russia. In an article entitled *50 Years of the European Integration and Russia* on 25 March 2007, Vladimir Putin stated that:

‘[o]ur common goal of comprehensive, intensive and long-term cooperation is bringing tangible results. Our joint efforts have already allowed us to build a solid foundation for a strategic partnership and promising joint projects. There is an increasing dialogue between various sectors of industry. We have a deepening sense of fellowship in our common struggle against new threats. Bilateral trade relations are flourishing and investments are growing. Cultural, humanitarian and educational contacts are widening. In the nearest future the Visa Facilitation Agreement will become effective’.

#### ***5.1.4 ‘Strategic Partnership’ and ‘Mistrust’ between ‘Good Friends’***

Despite the Russian satisfaction with the positives outcomes of bilateral cooperation, the next summit took place in Samara on 18 May 2007 and the atmosphere was again one of mutual criticism. The press statement and answer to questions provided with meaningful declarations from Putin and the European representatives. At this summit the declarations mainly addressed



the negative feelings regarding the ‘strategic partnership’ and tried to present an optimistic evaluation of bilateral relations. The declarations also showed how these leaders understood ‘strategic partnership’ at this moment. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, also president of the European Council, argued that ‘we have not always been able to convince each other of our opinions. However, I consider that it is always much better to talk to one another rather than about one another. (...) We see Russia as our nearest neighbor and an important strategic partner. (...) [W]e are also interested in *reliable relations*. (...) We want to cooperate.’ Also representing the EU view, Mr. Barroso openly said:

‘[L]et us be honest. Difficulties exist, we discuss them honestly and openly; we discuss these difficulties candidly. Madam Chancellor and I discuss them openly with President Putin. But it is precisely because of these difficulties that we are interested in developing our dialogue. We have identified and highlighted the areas where there has been visible progress. There is significant progress in a number of areas. Difficulties remain in several other areas. (...) [W]e must not allow the difficulties to *pollute* or *contaminate* – if I may put it that way – progress towards good collaboration. Our cooperation in many areas is positive cooperation.’

Thus Mr. Barroso identified difficulties, but like Mrs. Merkel, and in contrast to the 2004 *Communication* presented when Mr. Prodi was in office, he focused on the substance and the form. He stressed the relevance of developing a dialogue with Russia and pointed out that the bilateral relationship was threatened by reactions to the existence of disagreements. The president of the European Commission stressed that form had led to substance, and that a focus on tensions should be avoided for further cooperation. Putin’s remarks stayed in line with the declarations of the European representatives. However, the Russian president also pointed out that Russia should not be taken as guilty for any differences that could come up in the bilateral relationship and that there was a predisposition within the European audience to react more negatively about Russian positions:

‘[t]he EU has other countries with which it cultivates strategic relationships. And there is the problem of Guantanamo and the problem of death penalty, something that is not one of the EU’s moral values. And yet you don’t question the need for developing a strategic partnership with those countries. (...) Now, of course, the situation has changed radically. And not simply because Russia has changed. Russia’s economic potential has increased: it has been restored and continues to develop. ... Our opportunities have increased. They have become more significant. But the EU has also changed. The number of EU members has increased. And of course it became more difficult to resolve issues within the EU that had previously been easier to resolve. (...) I cannot say whether anything has become better or worse, it has simply become more difficult. But we are satisfied with the quality of our relations with the EU. And when we talk about equal rights we mean that we expect that our dialogue will take into account the interests of both Russia and the EU and that we will find a compromise that satisfies both sides.’

Both Putin and the EU representatives emphasized their recognition of challenges as well as an overall optimism vis-à-vis the ‘strategic partnership’. Putin also insisted on the necessity to compromise. Interesting as well was the claim that Russia could not be seen as the only source of disagreements in the bilateral relationship and the double standard used by the

European audience to evaluate the relationship with Russia. In the following months, a tone of conciliation and adjustment was evident in the leaders' declarations on both sides. For example, European Commissioner for External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, declared on 24 October 2007 in Strasburg that

'Russia is not only a close neighbour, but it is also a strategic partner for the European Union. EU-Russia trade and investment is booming and our energy interdependence is growing. Russia is a key partner to tackle regional conflicts and global challenges. But much remains to be done to develop the full potential of our relationship.'

At the Russia-EU Summit in Mafra on 26 October Vladimir Putin also mentioned the problems between the parties but stressed 'that the immutability of the strategic partnership between the European Union and the Russian Federation could be reaffirmed.' In this statement the Russian president indicated his agreement regarding the current frame of the 'strategic partnership' and continuing a cooperation-based relationship. But he also claimed that the 'strategic partnership', as it was currently managed, could not be changed. A partnership between equals, one in which each side respected the individual interests of the other and in which disagreements would be dealt without pessimism and mistrust, was in Putin's view the right configuration for the 'strategic partnership' and should remain unaltered.

Nevertheless, the 'game' of 'strategic partnership' played by the EU and Russia was not a closed system. Other texts and events not limited to their bilateral relations had the potential to influence how each side made sense of the declarations made by the other side. In the second half of the 2000s the emphasis on the disagreements between Russia and the EU and the doubts concerning Russia's reliability as a partner were enhanced. This focus on divergences, mistrust and incompatibilities was connected to episodes limited to their bilateral relations, but was also related to a more general shift in Russia's foreign policy and to episodes of conflict with other countries and organizations like NATO. In this context much prominence was given to declarations seen as threats, for example, Putin's speech at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy. In this speech held on 2 October 2007 the Russian president criticized the unilateral foreign policy of the United States, rejected critiques to Russian democracy and condemned the NATO ongoing expansion projects.<sup>61</sup> At this moment Russia strongly criticized the NATO project of construction of a missile shield in Poland and in the Czech Republic for the protection of European countries from an alleged Iranian threat. Hence, in a moment when the clashes especially between Russia and the US became more visible, mistrust towards Russia

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<sup>61</sup> If one compares this speech with Putin's declarations on 4 June 2000 at the Russia-US Summit, it is clear how strongly Russia's foreign policy discourse has changed. In 2000 Putin states that '[t]oday, the United States is among our principal partners. As for Russia, it will never make a choice in favor of confrontation in its relations with the United States.'

grew and was transferred to the bilateral sphere of the EU-Russia relations. At this moment, many analysts like De Wilde and Pellon (2006), Kempe and Smith (2006), Medvedev (2006) and Krastev (2007) either started questioning the possibility of defining the relationship between Russia and the EU as a ‘strategic partnership’ or argued that they were experiencing a moment of stagnation. For some reason – that I would argue is related to the remaining Cold War common ground – these interpretations were strongly accepted by the audience and what followed was a period in which there was a real belief that the EU-Russia relations were undergoing a moment of crisis. As a consequence, European representatives and the Russian presidency made strong efforts to oppose this discourse of incompatibilities and crisis and emphasize the positive results of bilateral cooperation and dialogue.

At the 44th Munich Conference on Security Policy on 10 February 2008 Javier Solana delivered a speech entitled, *Where is Russia going? A new attempt for an all-European Security Order* in which the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) stated *inter alia* that:

‘Russia is back. For us, Europe is stronger and more stable with a strong and open Russia reaching out to the world. (...)

In this new international security architecture, Russia is a key partner. We want to work as much as possible with a Russia that is ready to play its part. (...)

We have some well-known disagreements. From trade disputes to travel restrictions over whether media and organizations like the British Council can operate in truly free and independent manner. But trade is booming. And cooperation expanding to a wide range of areas. This broad nature of relationship has a stabilizing effect.

Nevertheless, we do not have a real strategic convergence yet. Still lingering mistrust here and there. I believe we are at a turning point.’<sup>62</sup>

Solana’s diagnosis followed the formula of trying to show honesty by an acknowledgement of obstacles and mistrust and the lack of a ‘*real strategic convergence*’ while stating the impossibility for Europe to dissociate its security from Russia.<sup>63</sup> His claim regarding the ‘turning point’ was also important because, if contrasted with Putin’s declarations, it showed that on the one hand Russia was satisfied with the framework of the ‘strategic partnership’, on the other hand the representatives of the EU saw the necessity of a shift that could convert the ‘strategic partnership’ into a relationship that would also work for the EU.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Council of the European Union (2008) *Summary of the address by the EU High Representative for CFSP, Javier Solana (S055/08), Munich, 10 February 2008*

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

In March 2008 the *EU-Russia Common Spaces Progress Report 2007* was published. The report underlined the partnership's many positive developments but also pointed to a tension between 'convergence' and 'divergence':

'[t]he scope of Trade and Economic cooperation between the EU and Russia has gained tremendous importance notably in the field of energy. Communication between the EU and Russia has improved at all levels, and there is a better understanding of respective regulatory environments in numerous sectors on both sides. Concrete outcomes can reasonably be expected in the medium or long term as far as regulatory convergence is concerned. (...) A new Russian competition law was adopted in 2006, followed by the entry into force of new, increased penalties for competition infringements in 2007. Though differences still remain, the new law, to which the Commission made a significant input, approximates Russian legislation to the *acquis* on competition (including for example a chapter on State Aid).'

Hence, it could be argued that at the beginning of 2008 there was a clash of interpretations and discourses concerning the EU-Russia strategic partnership. For some years it had been proposed that the 'strategic partnership' should take into consideration the interests of both sides and that some disagreements and divergences were acceptable to some extent. However, despite the many good results – e.g. the Readmission Agreement and the Visa Facilitation Agreement regarding Kaliningrad signed in 2007 – the existence of some disagreements and an atmosphere of mistrust were enough to convince the audience to support the evaluations centered on incompatibilities. Russia and the EU were seen as partners going in different directions and in that context the language used by the representatives of the EU incorporated this interpretation and a claim for a restructuration of the terms of the 'strategic partnership', the necessity of a new beginning.

At this moment many sensitive issues piled up and influenced the ability of both sides to transcend their respective mistrust. In an article of Sergey Lavrov entitled *Russia in the World in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, published in the magazine *Russia in Global Politics* on 7 August 2008, the Russian Foreign Minister suggested a pause for reflection and restructuration of the relationship with the EU and the US:

'[i]t wouldn't hurt us all to think and look around a bit – that's what the "pause" we suggest is all about. But this means that the disputed projects should all be terminated, be it the unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence, the plans to deploy elements of a US global missile defense system in Eastern Europe or NATO's eastward expansion. Because any striving to complete at any cost by a specific date that which causes categorical non-acceptance by partners and threatens a collapse of the established relations will trigger a reaction. This vicious circle needs to be broken.'

The problem was actually how to break the 'vicious circle' if the positions of Russia and the EU were so discrepant in a handful of issues. Taking the example of the missile defense system project, it was clear that it was difficult for the parties even to reach a basic consensus that Russia was not the threat that justified the project. In a joint press conference with

Medvedev and German Chancellor Merkel in Sochi, on 15 August 2008, the Russian president would argue that:

‘[t]he Russian military officials are right. This decision demonstrates very clearly what we have been talking about of late, that the deployment of the new missile defence system in Europe is directed against the Russian Federation. The moment has been chosen accordingly. The stories about this all being to deter rogue states do not hold water.’

In turn, Angela Merkel stated that Russia’s distrust had no basis:

‘[i]n my view, this agreement is not aimed at Russia but is rather an example of anti-ballistic missile defence, of a system of anti-ballistic missile defence that will protect against countries such as Iran. We will continue to advocate that these negotiations should not be interrupted and convince Russia of this and convince it to engage in this process as well.’

It is interesting to note that in a context in which such clear disagreements were present, some examples of optimistic evaluations of the bilateral relationship can be found. At the EU-Russia Summit on 27 June 2008 in Khanty Mansyisk the parties announced, after the conclusion of negotiations with some individual EU Member States, the start of negotiations of a new agreement to replace the old *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement*. At this occasion the Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin stated that ‘[t]he future agreement will be an instrument for genuine rapprochement between Russia and the European Union. It should be built on the principles of equality, pragmatism, mutual respect for each other’s interests and, of course, common approaches to key security issues. It will lay the long-term foundation for the strategic partnership between Russia and the European Union.’ Mr. Barroso declared that he was ‘confident that, with the adoption of a new agreement, our relations will begin a new chapter.’ Both sides saw the agreement as the milestone for a new, more positive phase in the bilateral relationship. Both stressed the moment of rapprochement and new beginning, but in its substance, the ‘strategic partnership’ was proposed by Putin in the same terms that he had been hinting at in the previous years. The only difference was the principle of ‘pragmatism’ as one of the pillars for the future ‘strategic partnership’.

On 12 July 2008 Russia launched its new *Foreign Policy Concept* in which the country continued to emphasize the positive relationship with the EU: ‘[f]rom the long-term perspective, it is in the interests of Russia to agree with the European Union on a strategic partnership treaty setting special, most advanced forms of equitable and mutually beneficial cooperation with the European Union in all spheres with a view to establishing a visa free regime’. In the context of the ‘new chapter’ in the EU-Russia relations, the new elected Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev, even proposed the creation of an all-encompassing New European Security System, aimed at overcoming security tensions between the EU and Russia. But when relations seemed to be heading towards a better direction, a new major crisis put Russia and the EU on opposite sides. The Russian-Georgian ‘Five Day War’ in August 2008,

followed by the Russian recognition of the sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, would again feed into Europe feelings of distrust towards Russia. But surprisingly this complex crisis would not bring the ‘strategic partnership’ to a dead end.

The EU’s response to the war was quick and mediated by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy. *The Economist* on 28 August 2008<sup>65</sup> quoted President Medvedev explaining the logic of Russia’s approach to Georgia. The Russian president made reference to a previous episode of divergence between many EU member states and Russia to argue in favor of the legitimacy of Russia’s military response: the independence of Kosovo. He argued that the justification based on the principle of auto-determination also applied in the cases of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In this context, the official EU position on the issue was to condemn the violation of Georgian sovereignty. Javier Solana declared on 1 September 2008 that ‘[t]he situation today is clear. Georgia is a country whose territorial integrity has been breached and there is tremendous damage on the ground as concerns people, property, etc and it is our obligation to help. We want to help people in Georgia. We have also already made clear statements on the recognition issue – we are against it.’

If the previous phase of mistrust is taken into consideration, however, the European response was not as harsh as one might have expected. Instead of simply condemning the Russian military campaign, the EU chose to get involved in the conflict, to act as a mediator and tried to emphasize that, despite the crisis, this was not a moment to doubt the constructive outcomes of a cooperation with Russia. The episode was even perceived on the Russian side as a positive outcome of EU-Russia cooperation. In his article entitled *Russian Foreign Policy and a New Quality of the Geopolitical situation*, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov, stated:

‘[w]e are glad that resolving the Caucasus crisis has provided a serious subject of our interaction with the European Union in regional affairs. Essentially, a European solution of the problem was found, in consequence of which EU unity grows stronger on a sober, pragmatic basis. (...) It is good that the initiative of French President Sarkozy, supported by the European Union, remedied the situation.’<sup>66</sup>

At the joint statement at the EU-Russia Summit in Nice on 14 November 2008 both parties declared that ‘[w]ith regard to Georgia, the European Union noted that Russia has fulfilled a very large part of its commitments.’ The tone in the declaration was that further steps had to be followed by Russia, but there was no real reprimand from the EU. In a speech on 13

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<sup>65</sup> ‘South Ossetia is not Kosovo’, *The Economist*, 28 August 2008.

<sup>66</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (official site) *Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov’s Article ‘Russian Foreign Policy and a New Quality of the Geopolitical Situation’ for Diplomatic Yearbook 2008*, <[http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/bc2150e49dad6a04c325752e0036e93f?OpenDocument](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/bc2150e49dad6a04c325752e0036e93f?OpenDocument)>.

November 2008 the former European Commissioner for Trade, Catherine Ashton, called the attention to the fact that ‘[i]n recent years our two way trade has been growing at an annual rate of 20 %. It is now three times larger than it was in 2000. Our economic relationship is healthy.’<sup>67</sup> Thus according to Ashton the ‘strategic partnership’ was healthier than ever before, or at least that was what the European representatives were trying to convince themselves and the audience of.

Nevertheless, this episode revealed the grave differences in regards to the content of declarations within the bilateral political dialogue in which the supranational EU is the interlocutor and other fora in which the intergovernmental EU, constituted by the member states, has the possibility to express itself and explain its perception on relations with Russia. In the European Council Presidency Conclusions of December 2008 the evaluation of the European heads of state and government after the war was openly negative. The European heads of state and government used the opportunity to recall the values on which the partnership with Russia should be based:

‘[o]ur relations with Russia have deteriorated over the conflict with Georgia. The EU expects Russia to honour its commitments in a way that will restore the necessary confidence. Our partnership should be based on respect for common values, notably human rights, democracy, and rule of law, and market economic principles as well as on common interests and objectives.’

It must be stressed that the bilateral relationship between the European Union and Russia is certainly influenced and takes into consideration the evaluation and voices of Member States. But the institution responsible for negotiations with Russia on behalf of the EU is the European Commission and other representatives of the supranational EU. In this context, the European Council is both a voice that could not be ignored in the linguistic environment constituted by the parties and a good thermometer of the reactions of the audience regarding the speech acts made by Russia and the EU in an attempt at defining the terms of their interaction. Hence, this fragment shows how the clash of discourses that permeates the EU-Russia relations is also related to the existence of a supranational EU and an intergovernmental EU, which evaluate the outcome of events according to a different point of view.

Three years after the big crisis of 2005–2006 that led to the disruption of gas transport to Western Europe, the divergences between Russia and the Ukraine on gas prices once more escalated in 2009, leading to a new conflict that fuelled criticisms to the EU’s energetic dependence on Russia. The EU again emerged as mediator of a crisis involving Russia. In this context, after the agreement signed in January that solved the crisis, the president of the

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<sup>67</sup> Ashton, Catherine (2008) *Foreign investment, strategic industries, and protectionism. Speech by EU Trade Commissioner Catherine Ashton at the EU-Russia Industrialists Roundtable, Cannes, 13 November 2008*, <[http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2008/november/tradoc\\_141339.pdf](http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2008/november/tradoc_141339.pdf)>.

European Commission, Mr. Barroso, declared on 5 February 2009 before attending meetings with Russian representatives in Moscow: ‘I look forward to discussing how we can work together to build-up trust and make the EU Russia relationship a more reliable partnership at all levels.’ Even the president of the European Commission recognized that recent episodes had been working against a perception of Russia as a trustworthy partner. Despite the successful results of the EU’s participation in the settlement of the crisis, ‘trust’ remained the main issue that defined the bilateral relationship between Russia and the EU.

On 12 May 2009, Russia launched the *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020*. The relationship with the EU was as usual mentioned. Article 16 of the document said:

‘[t]he Russian Federation is in favour of strengthening the mechanisms of cooperation with the European Union by all possible means, including the continued formation of common spaces in the economic, educational, scientific and cultural spheres, and in terms of internal and external security. The long-term national interests of Russia are served by the creation of an open system of Euro-Atlantic collective security, on a clear legal and treaty basis.’

In article 21 the development of democracy and civil society were presented as national interests. But the same article also pointed out the transformation of the Russian Federation into a world power and this was the kind of assertive foreign policy statement that reminded the Europeans of a past in which Russia was not a country to be trusted.

At the EU-Russia Summit in Khabarovsk on 21–22 May 2009, Vaclav Klaus, the president of the Czech Republic and of the European Council, emphasized ‘our mutual trust, which is very much needed and important.’ He addressed the use of the term ‘strategic partnership’ by the Russian president as well, made a light criticism about what it meant to have a so-called relationship, and argued that trust was missing for a real ‘strategic partnership’ to be achieved:

‘President Medvedev used several times in his presentation the term “strategic partnership”. I would like to confirm that the European Union considers Russia as its strategic partner. We feel that it is necessary to do something to make it real, not just as a formal proclamation, and for a strategy partnership trust is very much indeed.’

In this fragment the Czech president made an assertive speech act about Russia as a strategic partner. Russia was acknowledged as such but was also put in the position of a partner that lacked reliability, the guilty party that was debilitating the ‘strategic partnership’ and hindering the acceptance of this assertion by the audience. In this context, the president of the European Commission argued in favor of a relationship based on political dialogue as the channel of cooperation, but his remarks also claimed for more honesty in the communication between both sides: ‘[r]egular, frank and open political dialogue is indeed the right way to manage our relationship, and this must occur at all times, no matter how difficult the issue at



stake.’ In addition to that, Barroso also emphasized how necessary, actually ‘indispensable’, Russia was for the EU:

‘[w]e are deeply, and inevitably interdependent, and this could and should be perceived positively by our citizens. We work in the spirit of positive interdependence. I am convinced that President Medvedev personally, and Russia as an indispensable partner of the European Union, share this spirit. So, my main message, of interdependence and cooperation today was precisely this one. Let’s apply this spirit and develop all the untapped potential of our relationship.’

Here Mr. Barroso brought back a term that was previously used by his predecessor Romano Prodi in the 2004 *Communication* to the European Parliament and Council: ‘positive interdependence’. It seems that when the European Commission understands the context as too critical, it needs to convince the audience that the interdependence in this case is ‘positive’. Notwithstanding the fact that interdependence is normally underlined because it is perceived as positive in cooperative relationships, here it had to be overemphasized, as if the audience had to be really convinced that it was positive. Hence, it can be seen that in the pronouncements of EU representatives there is a constant tension between the use of ‘strategic partnership’ to promote an approximation, implement new projects of cooperation and overturn a mutual perception of mistrust and the discourse’s capacity, based on the enunciation of this term, to *de facto* reconstitute the terms of the bilateral relationship.

At the news conference following the EU-Russia Summit in Stockholm on 18 November 2009, the remarks of Russian and European representatives once more seemed an effort to defend the discourse of ‘strategic partnership’ despite its problems. Frederik Reinfeld, president of the European Council and Swedish Prime Minister, repeated the mantra and declared that ‘Russia is of course a key strategic partner to the European Union’. He further argued that ‘[s]ometimes we disagree, but that’s not a reason not to meet. On the contrary, that’s a reason to meet. That’s why we need these discussions.’ On the Russian side, President Medvedev stressed the friendly atmosphere and that the partnership was ‘unavoidable’.

2009 was a decent year for the EU-Russia cooperation. For example, an agreement was signed to implement the energy *Early Warning Mechanism*. The *EU Common Spaces Progress Report 2009*, launched in March 2010, also pointed to other achievements in the bilateral relationship, e.g. the fact that five rounds of negotiations of the *New EU-Russia Agreement* were held, the continuity in the implementation of visa facilitation and readmission agreements, the establishment of a Northern Dimension Partnership in culture. The report also identified problems, for example, the human rights situation in Northern Caucasus. But the language of the report showed a more positive than negative assessment of the bilateral relationship.

In 2010, after the *Treaty of Lisbon* was put into action, a renewed optimism could be seen in the declarations of representatives. The recognition of divergences returned as a regular

feature in the speeches, but they were not seen negatively. References to a lack of trust or the necessity of trust within the ‘strategic partnership’ were also visibly reduced. At the Summit in Rostov-on-Don on 1 June 2010, the Russian president argued that ‘[t]here are issues on which our positions diverge. But that, on the other hand, does not prevent us from finding opportunities for compromise and solutions to the issues on which our approaches closely coincide.’ Barroso insisted on the mutual dependency of Russia and the EU to advocate an ever stronger relationship: ‘[l]ooking at geopolitics and geo-economics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it seems crystal clear that the European Union and Russia must be side by side, in a very close partnership.’ The most interesting remarks were made by the new president of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy. He argued that:

‘[h]istory and geography have made us different but also neighbours. We are dependent on each other and on the well being of our neighbours. (...) we would like to see a more constructive role played by Russia (...) Russia is a real strategic partner to the EU. With you we have a most intensive and dynamic dialogue. With Russia we do not need a “reset”. We want a “fast forward”.’

Therein Van Rompuy stressed that Russia was different, but that their shared neighborhood forces them to cooperate. The president of the European Council reaffirmed the status of Russia in relation to the EU and asked for a Russian change of posture. But he also made an interesting comparison of the relations of Russia with the EU and the US. He made reference to recent declarations in which negotiations between Medvedev and President Barack Obama were framed in terms of a ‘reset’, an act of forgetting all the negative episodes that could hold back the possibilities of cooperation between Russia and the US. Van Rompuy tried to tell the audience that the US-Russia relationship was indeed problematic, and the only way for them to change the terms of their relationship was to start anew, but that this was not the case for EU-Russia relations. There was no need to forget the process bringing Russia and the EU to the present situation because this common past did not impede both sides to engage in new positive common initiatives. It actually made the parties long for the positive results in their bilateral cooperation. Also interesting in the ‘fast forward’ metaphor was that it implied both parties wanted to advance to the future goal in a way that they could ‘ignore’ the process. One could draw from Van Rompuy’s metaphor that he knew that in the process would include episodes of disagreement, but those could be ‘ignored’ and not be seen as an obstacle. They are part of a process that may lead both sides to achieve a desirable end.

During the summit the *EU-Russia Partnership for Modernization* was launched. Mr. Barroso explained the nature of the project as ‘a shared modernization agenda to advance our economies and bring our citizens closer together.’ It must be stressed that this partnership foresees modernization in Russia, but most of the projects are joint initiatives, which do not

necessarily correspond to a directive posture from the EU to modernize Russia according to its sole interests. In the following bilateral summit on 7 December in Brussels a work plan of the planned activities was presented and at first glance this set of projects appeared transparent and well-coordinated. More interesting in the context of the present chapter however, is how the claims for more convergence between Russia and the EU are connected to the idea of modernization in the discourse of European representatives. In his remarks at the summit, Herman Van Rompuy stated that '[t]he EU and Russia are real strategic partners who try to find solutions for common problems. The direction of our relations is towards more convergence. The political will is really present to go ahead with modernization in all fields of society.' The listener of such a statement could conclude that modernization both in Russia and in the EU would lead to a better environment that will enable convergence.

At the occasion, Mr. Barroso highlighted the importance of the initiative because according to him 'apart from good intentions, we have now a very concrete plan on the development of concrete actions around this partnership for modernization.' The president of the European Commission went further and argued that the initiative, and the context in which it was coined, show that 'our strategic partnership is certainly no catchphrase.' He then introduced an interesting metaphor: '[l]ike good friends, we discuss issues, frankly and constructively, including topics where our views may diverge, and we try to find a common ground.' These declarations are important because they target one of the main problems of the bilateral relationship: the lack of legitimacy of the declarations that claim that improvements are possible, that trust can be built, and that a more convergent relationship may be achieved. Mr. Barroso made reference again to the idea of 'friendship', but applying the idea of good friends. Good friends may fight, they may experience bad phases in their relationship, but they never forget how important they are to each other, they always care about the other, and more importantly, they eventually always find a common ground to maintain their friendship. And in a context of renewed hope regarding the 'strategic partnership', this metaphor had the potential to be really perceived as a good narrative for the EU-Russia relations, which could replace the resilient discourse of incompatibilities.

At the bilateral summit in Nizhny Novgorod on 10 June 2011 Van Rompuy's remarks balanced optimism with a pinch of criticism. The president of the European Council stated that '[t]he EU-Russia relationship is enjoying its best dynamics for years. We can build on a track record of strengthened trust and constructive dialogue. (...) Despite the personal engagements and initiatives of President Medvedev there are still strong concerns in our Member States and among the European public about the situation of human rights.' What is interesting in this

fragment is that ‘trust’ appeared for the first time in a positive remark. The message of the European representatives was that in addition to the constructive dialogue Russia had to show better results in some areas as well, but the tone of Van Rompuy’s declarations was not harsh. The EU was again positioning itself in a way to demand a change of posture to some extent, but in a way not to portray the situation as a conflict. The speech of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, in the European Parliament on 6 July 2011, before the Russian State Duma elections, also followed this view when she stated that ‘Russia remains an essential EU partner, and a challenging one.’

This understanding of the ‘strategic partnership’ as a relationship between friends that sometimes disagree was incorporated in the official discourse of both the EU and the Russian presidency, and is the ‘meaning’ of this term that both sides try to claim until today. ‘Strategic partnership’ understood in this way allows for a further development of the cooperative relations while acknowledging the differences of opinion and even occasional deadlocks in the negotiation of particular sensitive issues. By enunciating this concept in such a way, both parties stress the relevance of their cooperative joint initiatives, the symmetry of power within the relationship and protect the legitimacy of the relationship in moments of crisis. It is the concept that allows the parties to overcome to some extent their trust issues.

‘Strategic partnership’ is not a mere descriptive concept. It is in a way a declaration of intentions, which has constitutive consequences for the perceptions of the parties about each other and about their bilateral relationship. And despite the clear interest of EU officials and of the Russian presidency to support a discourse in favor of dialogue and deeper cooperation and the suspicion and mistrust of a European audience towards Russian foreign policy, the relationship framed as a ‘strategic partnership’ has allowed the parties to maintain a long term dialogue and search for new common objectives. Mr. Barroso’s declaration following the bilateral summit in December 2011 shortly summarizes the intentions of the EU regarding its relations with Russia and how he frames this relationship:

‘[i]t was indeed a very successful summit. This was a Summit of results where we made real progress on a number of issues of our bilateral agenda. (...) Indeed, we share a truly Strategic Partnership and I am convinced that we can only gain from further deepening our cooperation. It is through frank, open, regular, constructive dialogue that we can achieve our common goals.’

The quotation shows that the primary objective of the EU concerning Russia is to establish long-term dialogue-based cooperation with this country. As long as the parties maintain a sustainable dialogue that allows them to identify common goals and work together to achieve them, EU and Russia have a ‘truly strategic partnership’. In this context, 2012 was a year in which EU-Russia relations remained stable. On the one hand the leaders of both sides

clearly stressed the positive results of bilateral cooperation, while opposed opinions about particular bilateral and international issues showed that if the EU and Russia are really ‘good friends’ they are really stubborn friends and not very eager to compromise.

At the joint conference after the summit in June 2012 the leaders of Russia and the EU talked again to the press and while they held diverging positions on topics like the Syrian civil war they tried to highlight the achievements of their bilateral cooperation. The president of the European Council stated that:

‘[a]s you all know, the results of the two last years are remarkable: the Russian WTO accession, the Partnership for Modernisation, and the common steps towards visa-free travel. The EU-Russia relationship is enjoying its best dynamics for years. However, there is still much we need to do in order to untap what is potentially possible. Strong political will and hard work will therefore be needed even in the coming years. (...) The European Union and Russia might have some diverging assessments, but we fully agree that the Annan Plan as a whole provides the best opportunity to break the cycle of violence in Syria, avoiding a civil war, and in finding a peaceful lasting solution.’

In the meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin once again repeated the mantra of acknowledging the divergences while stressing that possible clashes were part of their relationship and did not impede the parties to further develop their cooperation: ‘[o]f course, our views do not coincide on all issues, but I think we succeeded in reaffirming our commitment to our chosen course and have sent a clear political signal in favour of intensifying our cooperation. Now we must keep up the pace and keep moving forward.’ What can be understood from Putin’s quote is that if Russia and the EU frame their relationship as a ‘strategic partnership’, this expression means that within this association differences in opinion should be ignored and the parties should focus on what can be achieved through common efforts.

Hence, it is very clear that despite good results, the parties recognize the difficulty in legitimizing a cooperative bilateral relationship in which it is assumed from the beginning that one cannot count on the partner at all times. This is certainly a *sui generis* notion of cooperation, which is sustained by real achievements but is based mainly on the ‘potential’ of the relationship, the possibility that despite some clashing interests there are good reasons to believe that the relationship can be successful. Mr. Barroso’s declaration at the same press conference shows this idea very well:

‘[a]s the most famous Russian poet Alexander Pushkin, who studied, lived and died in St Petersburg, once wrote: “we can try and fail, but we should not fail to try.” The European Union is looking forward to try - and not to fail - is looking forward to try and to succeed. And I am sure that we will succeed in the partnership with Russia.’

This statement is interesting because the president of the European Commission clearly said that the EU is ‘trying’. Mr. Barroso affirmed that the EU wants to succeed but he recognizes also the possibility to fail. His intent was to express optimism but the way he delivered this message also revealed the uncertainty about the future of the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’.

2012 was a year in which four main topics were at the center of EU and Russia negotiations: 1) the conflict in Syria; 2) the ‘third energy package’; 3) the visa-free travel agreement; 4) and the new framework agreement that would replace the PCA. Whereas the bilateral relationship was certainly producing good trade results and both sides had positively evaluated the ‘Partnership for Modernisation’, the complexity of the negotiations involving these four issues could be perceived as a sign of deeper problems within the ‘strategic partnership’. In this context, the strategy adopted by Russian and EU representatives was, as seen above, to insist on the fact that divergences of opinion and tough negotiations did not represent a crisis.

However, despite the efforts to convince the audience that the relationship was experiencing a good moment, as usual the parties kept a defensive posture. In face of particular deadlocks in negotiations about sensitive issues, there was a tendency on both sides to point fingers and try to show to the audience that the other was guilty for the absence of results regarding the discussion of particular issues. During the December 2012 Summit, Putin wanted to show that Russia was fulfilling its duties and there were EU member states that were responsible for the absence of visa-free bilateral agreement: ‘I want to note that I feel we have resolved nearly all technical issues related to introducing a visa-free regime. Now, all that remains is for a political decision to be made by our European colleagues.’ In a more embarrassing episode by the end of the press conference after the summit, Putin accused Barroso and their European counterparts for the disagreements regarding the ‘third energy package’ which would affect the operations of Russian energy firms working in the EU territory: ‘[m]y long-time friend Mr Barroso explained his position so emotionally and at such length because he feels wrong, guilty. And you have become witnesses of our discussion. Open article 34 of our framework agreement with the EU and read it for yourselves.’ Regardless of Putin’s interpretation about article 34 of the PCA impeding the application of the ‘third energy package’ in the case of Russian enterprises being right or wrong, the fact is that Putin is accusing his European counterparts of not following the bilateral agreements, of trying to harm Russian interests, of not acting in accordance to the ‘spirit’ of their ‘strategic partnership’. Surely, that does not contribute to trust building and shows how difficult it is to reach a consensus within the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’.

EU and Russia are strategic partners. Both sides acknowledge this status. The real problem is to understand what that entails. At the December 2012 summit Mr. Barroso argued that:

‘[t]he European Union and Russia are indeed strategic partners of a special kind. We are neighbours, we are also linked by history, by culture, and we are, to a large extent, economically interdependent. (...) Our relation has a huge potential for cooperation with gains for both sides. As we have proposed to President Putin we should transform what is today an interdependence by necessity into an interdependence by choice. The European Union remains fully interested to engage with Russia in this direction on the basis of common values, mutual interest, mutual benefit and mutual respect.’

Mr. Barroso’s declaration is important because he highlights the idea that the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’ is a *sui generis* relationship. Even if one has a pre-conception about what a ‘strategic partnership’ is, the president of the European Commission affirms that it is a ‘strategic partnership of a special kind’. He reaffirmed the common values shared by the parties and the interdependent nature of their relationship. Yet by saying that it is still not a relationship based on a genuine desire to cooperate but rather on necessity, he framed the ‘strategic partnership’ between Russia and the EU as a relationship based on ‘pragmatism’. Thus, the ‘good friends’ are not really motivated by ‘friendship’ but by ‘necessity’, or in other words a marriage of convenience. Russia and the EU are ‘natural partners’ not because they are moved by the choice to work together, but because their economies are interdependent and because they share common interests. That shows how complex and unique a ‘strategic partnership’ can be. It is not a descriptive concept with a single meaning. The EU-Russia relationship shows that this relationship is a ‘strategic partnership’, but that can mean different things. The EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’ is a relationship between equals that share common values and have common goals. However, it is also a relationship characterized by mistrust. In this context the parties enunciate their ‘strategic partnership’ to transcend this feeling and allow the relationship to move forward.

‘Strategic partnership’ is hence an expression that frames the terms of the EU-Russia relationship and as a speech act not only constitutes the rules and limits of this bilateral association, but also influences the behavior of the actors involved and their efforts to reposition themselves within this relationship. In addition, its enunciation also corresponds to the necessity to find a framework concept that can be accepted as legitimate by an audience that perceives this relationship as a form of cooperation of a ‘special kind’. ‘Strategic partnership’ – taken as a cooperative relationship between equals who share common goals and want to cooperate but are aware of their differences of opinion – suits the interests of both parties and allows them to overcome episodes of conflict and develop their relations even further.

The next section analyzes two crisis episodes. It aims to show how ‘strategic partnership’ is enunciated in contexts of bilateral crisis. Moreover it discusses how the enunciation of this expression influences the terms of the relations between Russia and the EU and allows the parties to quickly resume normal relations soon after major disagreements.

## **5.2 Crises and Impacts on the Bilateral Relationship: the Chechen and Georgia Wars**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the relations between the EU and Russia, both sides have experienced crisis episodes. In this section, two of these episodes will be discussed. After the reconstruction of the linguistic environment that permeates the relationship through an analysis of a longer time frame that started with the PCA, two military crises will be addressed. By analyzing language enunciated by both sides during the Chechen Wars and the Five Day War between Russia and Georgia, the intention is to observe how Russia and the EU positioned themselves in relation to one another and how the language enunciated through documents and speeches constitutes the terms of their bilateral relationship. These two particular episodes will be analyzed because they are both major conflict situations, which pushed the limits of the cooperative relationship between Russia and the EU to the brink of crisis. In this sense, they were important tests for the capacity of both sides to trust each other and look for cooperative solutions.

The Chechen Wars were selected because they took place in very singular moments. The First Chechen War (11 December 1994 – 31 August 1996) took place in a critical moment in the initial post-Cold War phase and presented itself as a major challenge for the Yeltsin administration. The Second Chechen War (the battle phase during the period 26 August 1999 – May, 2000, and the counter-insurgency phase in the period June, 2000 – 16 April 2009) also marked a fundamental transition point in Russian history, since most important moments coincided with the final phase of the Yeltsin administration and the beginning of the Putin administration. Thus, the Chechen Wars were an extremely relevant episode in the initial phases of EU-Russia relations.

The Georgian Five Day War (7 August – 12 August 2008) was a more recent crisis, which is why it was selected. It took place already in the Medvedev administration and is still a recent episode of bilateral crisis of the EU-Russia relations. It was a crisis between Russia and an enlarged EU and its analysis in comparison with a previous crisis moment like the Chechen wars allow a comparison between an initial and a recent phase of the bilateral relationship between Russia and the EU.

### ***5.2.1 The First and Second Chechen Wars***

Before the start of the First Chechen War, the relationship between Russia and the European Union was positive. In June 1994 the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* had been signed



in Corfu and was awaiting its ratification by all the parties involved before entering into force. On the eve of the beginning of the war one could observe the positive bilateral environment expressed in the Presidency Conclusions of the Essen European Council (9-10 December, 1994):

‘[t]he development of the European Union’s relations with Russia is an essential element in the maintenance of peace, security and stability in Europe. The European Council looks for the early ratification of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and is determined to exploit to the full its possibilities. It looks forward to a sustained constructive dialogue and partnership with Russia on political and economic issues.’

Despite the violence of the Russian military engagement in Chechnya, the initial response of the EU Member States was not as critical as it could have been. According to Kumar (1996, p. 26) there was an internal disagreement among the Member States about how to proceed, since many were defending the position that the Chechnya problem was an internal Russian issue. However, in face of images and reports of a disproportionate Russian military assault of Grozny, European leaders started expressing their concerns more starkly and some issued strong manifestations of dissatisfaction.

In January 1995, the Commissioner of Foreign Affairs of the EU, Hans van den Broek, spoke to a committee of the European Parliament, criticized Russia and announced the cancellation of the interim agreement to be put into force before the PCA, what could be considered soft sanctions to the country. In his speech, the European representative openly criticized how Russia was acting during the crisis: ‘[w]e don’t dispute that Chechnya is part of the Russian Federation, but we do have serious concern – verging on indignation – at the way a political problem is being addressed by military means.’ At the same time Moscow based ambassadors of countries like France, Germany and Spain, acting on behalf of the 15 Member States, requested formal explanations from Russia about the activities in Chechnya.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl demanded that ‘the Russian leadership and the Russian Parliament’ agree on a peaceful solution with the Chechen resistance.<sup>69</sup> And the French Minister of European Affairs, Alain Lamassoure, openly stated that the Russian behavior was not in accordance with the values of the EU: ‘Russia must know that the bombing of civilians with aircraft and hundreds of tanks is not a concept included in the European democratic model’.<sup>70</sup>

Even though criticisms were raised and some retaliation measures implemented there was a clear European interest that the crisis would not destroy the bilateral relations with the

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<sup>68</sup> ‘EU Delays Russia Pact Over Chechnya,’ *Los Angeles Times*, 6 January 1995.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

Russian government. That was very evident in declarations of EU's representatives. In a speech to the European Parliament on 17 January 1995, the president of the European Commission, Jacques Santer, described the situation as such:

'(...) we cannot fail to mention relations with Russia and the other members of the CIS, which are going through a difficult period, accompanied in some cases by serious disturbances, for example in Chechnya. The Union must do all it can to help these countries along the road to democracy and a market economy. It is in our interest to have partners that are constructive and willing to cooperate. Peace, nuclear safety, immigration and organized crime are just some of the important issues which can be tackled only by cooperation.'

Santer defined the episode of Chechnya as 'serious disturbance' but that was a very controlled statement if one considers that at this very moment the Battle of Grozny was taking place with full intensity. Instead of a direct and clear criticism, the president of the European Commission adopted a softer tone and stressed that the interests concerning the partnership remained intact. Therein it must be stressed that in the presence of the bloodiest reports of the war, the European response was tough in comparison to the reaction of other international political actors but it was always a response harsh enough to show that the Russian posture was not correct and mild enough not to put the EU's ambitions regarding Russia in jeopardy. Some Member States like France and other non-members like Scandinavian and Baltic countries assumed a more critical and threatening tone (Cornell, 1999, p. 91), but it can be said that in general and taking into consideration the human rights violations that were taking place in Grozny, the European reaction was timid both in the most critical moments and during the rest of the war.

In a speech at the European Institute on 15 June 1995, Jacques Santer argued that:

'[a]lthough our relations with Russia remain static at the moment as a result of the Chechnya tragedy, an ambitious wide ranging partnership and cooperation agreement will form the basis of our future relations. Drawing Russia into a new, deep relationship with the EU is a challenge of vital historical importance. However, we must continually search our consciences and ask ourselves, are we living up to this historical task?'

In this fragment it can be observed that the European Commission president admitted the 'static' moment in the bilateral relationship but immediately thereafter highlighted the relevance of the cooperative relationship with Russia and the challenge that it represented. Interestingly, the European representative put in doubt Europe's response to the obstacles associated with cooperation with Russia and the construction of a 'deep relationship'.

After the most critical phase of the war, but before its end, the European discourse was permissive in view of the Russian military deployment in the Chechen Republic. In the presidency conclusions of the Madrid European Council (15-16 December 1995) the benevolent posture of the EU towards Russia could be seen in two annexes dedicated to the relationship with Russia. None of the annexes even mentioned the Chechen War. Annex 8,

*European Union's strategy for future EU/Russia relations*, showed how the EU wanted to shape Russia in the spirit of the existing bilateral 'substantial partnership':

'5. The EU should encourage:

- the irreversible consolidation of economic reforms in Russia which, through economic growth and a steady rise in living standards, will promote stability in Russian society and strengthen democracy in that country; (...)
- the progressive integration between Russia and a wider area of cooperation in Europe;(...)

6. Methods: (...)

- continuing assistance to Russia's economic reforms through the TACIS programme whose visibility should be reinforced;'

Very similar to the text of the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement*, this quotation shows how the EU saw the bilateral relationship as a relationship in which the EU was in the position to promote change in Russia and incorporate in this country the European political and economic standards. This is more evidence of the asymmetrical character of the relationship at this moment.

Annex 9, the *European Council Declaration on Russia*, was the strongest example however of how the criticism of the beginning of the year had been replaced by a discourse of establishing a cooperative relationship at all cost:

'the European Union fully supports Russia's early membership of the Council of Europe and reiterates its resolve to continue its support for the process of democratic and economic reform.

It looks forward to the entry into force on 1 February 1996 of the interim agreement, which will provide a better basis for mutual relations pending early ratification of the partnership and cooperation agreement as soon as possible.'

Curiously, at the same time Russia was been criticized for violating humanitarian international law, the EU was supporting the Russian membership in the Council of Europe, an institution in which human rights are the essential topic on the agenda. In addition, the interim agreement that had been cancelled in the beginning of the year was reaffirmed. Actually, the agreement had already come back to the agenda and was signed on 17 July 1995. Hence, in a context of ongoing war and human rights violations, the EU 'looks forward' to the entry into force of the interim agreement and the ratification of the PCA.

As in 1995, in 1996 this European posture was maintained. In April the British Prime Minister John Major visited Moscow and talked to President Yeltsin. When answering a question about the discussion of human rights violations in Chechnya with the Russian president, the British Prime Minister answered:

'[o]f course I discussed Chechnya with President Yeltsin while I was here. He is looking to see what can be done to reach a negotiated settlement, clearly he needs to do that if it is possible. It needs two sides to negotiate was the point he made to me but he is clearly looking to see whether that can be achieved; it is desirable in order to move towards a settlement in Chechnya. He indicated to me that there were many areas of Chechnya where there was no difficulty that it existed rather fiercely in a

number of areas but in some areas it had gone away completely. I can neither verify nor dispute that, I report what the President said to me and he was certainly seeking to take a constructive role to see whether they could reach a settlement. (...) it would clearly be extremely helpful in the present political atmosphere if some movement could satisfactorily occur on Chechnya.'

What strikes the reader in this quote is the fact that the British representative argued that he could not dispute Russian declarations. He demonstrated an obvious desire for the conflict to be resolved by peaceful means but there was no real political pressure. Everything possible was done in the moment not to affect EU-Russia relations. In fact, even before the end of the war, the relationship turned back to its normal configuration and new achievements could be observed. In the presidency conclusions of the Florence European Council (21-22 June 1996) a declaration on Russia was announced in which:

'[t]he European Council reiterates the fundamental importance it attaches to the continued development of a close relationship and substantial partnership between the European Union and Russia and calls for the early ratification of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) which constitutes the basis of this relationship, so that it can enter into force as soon as possible.

Accordingly, the European Council welcomes the steady improvement in relations marked notably by the entry into force of the Interim Agreement on 1 February 1996 and the adoption of the Action Plan by the Council on 13 May 1996.'

Thus it is evident that the result desired was in fact achieved. According to Cornell (1999, p. 86), despite the war, the relationship between Russia and the West did not deteriorate. The strategy was to defend a 'Russia-and-Yeltsin-first' policy and not to lose control of the ongoing transitional political and economic process in Russia. During the Dublin European Council (13-14 December 1996) a similar message was announced in the presidency conclusions. The EU congratulated Yeltsin for the decision to withdraw Russian troops from Chechnya and for their choice to pursue the road towards the consolidation of 'democracy, the rule of law and a market economy'. In these conclusions, the EU reaffirmed once again its paternalistic speech and the rules of the partnership, according to which the EU would conduct Russia to a better future. In the document it can be read that '[t]he European Council reiterates the Union's readiness to assist the Russian Federation in meeting the difficult challenges ahead, notably through the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, the EU/Russia Action Plan and by bringing Russia as soon as possible into the WTO and other international fora.' It was clearly stated that it was through a relationship with the EU that Russia would have a chance to be accepted as a member and as a voice in the new institutions of political and economic governance of the post-Cold War system. Again, Russia was positioned as an actor in need of assistance and guidance of the EU.

Despite some tension during the Kosovo War (1998-1999), the relations between Russia and the EU remained in a good place from the end of the First Chechen War until the

second semester of 1999. At this moment, an important moment of transition was initiated. In a moment of intense political turmoil inside Russia, Chechen insurgents invaded Dagestan and triggered the Second Chechen War, while Vladimir Putin emerged as the political heir of Yeltsin and new great political leader in Russia.

After three-year ‘truce’ between Moscow and Grozny, the war resumed with great intensity. Yeltsin was soon the target of criticisms from the international community amid the destruction that the Russian army provoked in the Republic and the pain caused to the civil population. Yeltsin assumed a strong and intransigent discourse. In a speech made in November 1999 the Russian president argued that the critics ‘had no right to criticize Russia over Chechnya’. Furthermore he defended that: ‘we do not accept the prescriptions of the so-called objective critics of Russia, those who have failed to understand that we are quite simply obliged to put a stop in good time to the spread of the cancerous tumour of terrorism, to stop it spreading far beyond the North Caucasus and even outside the Russian Federation.’

This kind of statement was not sufficient to silence the international community and to avoid a reaction of the European Union. Despite the visible effort of the European leaders to control the potential damage of the situation to the bilateral relationship, the response of the European Union was much stronger during the beginning of the second Russian campaign in Chechnya. At the Helsinki European Council (10-11 December 1999) a *Declaration on Chechnya* was made public, through which the EU not only harshly criticized Russia, but also sanctioned the ‘strategic partner’. Among many resolutions, the European Council declared that:

‘2. The European Council does not question the right of Russia to preserve its territorial integrity nor its right to fight against terrorism. However the fight against terrorism cannot, under any circumstances, warrant the destruction of cities, nor that they be emptied of their inhabitants, nor that a whole population be considered as a terrorist.

3. This behaviour is in contradiction with the basic principles of humanitarian law, the commitments of Russia as made within the OSCE and its obligations as a member of the Council of Europe.’

By means of this document, the European representatives sanctioned Russia *inter alia* through the suspension of some provisions of the PCA – which had recently been implemented – the transfer of some of the TACIS funds to humanitarian assistance and limitation of the 2000 budget to priority areas, and the invitation to the OSCE to review the modalities of its cooperation with Russia. The sanctions were not as hard as they could have been, but this was an important signalization from the EU that Russia’s behavior was not considered acceptable.

In the *Statement by the Presidency on Behalf of the European Union on Chechnya* on 30 December 1999, the dissatisfaction with Russia was emphasized: ‘[w]e urge the Russian government to fulfill its obligations under international humanitarian law and as a member of

the United Nations, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, in the spirit of the strategic partnership between the EU and Russia.’ This was an interesting declaration because it was a clear statement that the EU was not supporting Russian action, and, in addition, it is a good example of the EU trying to direct the Russian behavior. The EU reinforced the concept of strategic partnership, but for the EU, the ‘spirit’ of the ‘strategic partnership’ was the obedience by Russia of the rules supported by the EU and the rest of the international community. The EU felt it had the right to ‘urge’ Russia to change its behavior.

On 31 December 1999, Boris Yeltsin resigned and Vladimir Putin assumed the presidency. With a strong discourse supporting Russian action in Chechnya the new Russian president regretted the pressure imposed by the international community, considered unfair. In an interview with BBC Putin declared that: ‘[r]egrettably, it appears that our partners in the West are all too often still in the grip of old notions and tend to picture Russia as a potential aggressor. That is a completely wrong conception of our country. It gets in the way of developing normal relations in Europe and in the world.’<sup>71</sup> Putin presented Russia as the misunderstood victim, who could not prove its innocence and the rationale for its actions. Nevertheless, therein also an important act of repositioning could be observed. Putin tried to oppose an image of Russia associated with the Soviet Union and the propensity for conflict.

In the same interview, Putin reiterated the Russian desire to construct a positive relationship with the EU. Interesting was how Putin presented the idea of ‘partnership’ that Russia was trying to construct with the EU. For the Russian president, ‘partnership’ meant ‘equitable cooperation’. And in that context, a ‘strategic partnership’ was characterized by the existence of a ‘zone of strategic interests’, which ‘means above all the interests of the people who live in [a] particular region’. This was an important speech act made by Putin, because it was a claim that the ‘strategic partnership’ between Russia and the EU would have to be changed to accommodate the interests of all the people within the Euro-Russian zone of strategic interests and establish ‘equitable cooperation.’

At the conclusion of the battle phase of the Second Chechen War and start of the counter-insurgency phase, European criticisms started to fade away, and optimism returned to the EU discourse. In an article published by the President Romano Prodi of the European Commission, in advance of the EU-Russia Summit on 26 May 2000, he stated that ‘we see reasons for optimism’. Additionally, the priority of the relationship was, as usual, reinforced: ‘[t]he EU is Russia’s first partner by far in all fields. This is why I look forward to meeting

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<sup>71</sup> President of Russia (Official Web Portal), *Interview to ‘BBC Breakfast with Frost’*, 5 March 2000

President Putin in the Kremlin and initiating strong co-operation which will be of strategic importance in the years to come both for the Russian Federation and for the European Commission.’

Nevertheless, Russia’s victory in the war and the ‘survival’ of the country in face of international criticism would mark the beginning of a new phase of Russian self-assertion and foreign policy discourse. In the following months, Russia would raise the tone in some declarations against the pressure suffered from partners like Europe. In an interview with the French weekly magazine *Paris-Match* on 6 July 2000, Putin declared that:

‘Russia is on the frontline in the fight against international terrorism. When the chips are down, Europe should be grateful to us and it should bow to us in recognition of our fight against international terrorism, which we have been conducting unfortunately, single-handedly so far.’

The statement could be considered arrogant. And this is actually what it was. As already stated in the previous section, Putin assumed the presidency with a more controlled discourse, without trying to outright the relationship with the EU. However, from this moment, Russian political rhetoric started a process of escalation that would culminate in a very open defense of change of the rules of the bilateral relationship and of the whole idea associated with ‘strategic partnership’.

### **5.2.2 The Five Day War**

From the beginning of the 2000s, the focus is moved to the year 2008 and moments before the Five Day War (7-12 August) in Georgia. At this time, the EU-Russia relationship did not experience a crisis, but the issue of the unilateral declaration of Kosovo in February 2008 and its support by many EU member states was still a fresh wound and an important obstacle in the context of the ‘strategic partnership’. In spite of this, the parties were trying as usual to overcome their disagreements. Just after Kosovo’s independence, German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, visited Russia. In a press conference following bilateral talks with Vladimir Putin, she once again recognized the existence of disagreements between Russia and Germany but reinforced the idea of ‘strategic partnership’<sup>72</sup>: ‘[w]e have found much in common and have had very open discussions on critical issues. We have discussed international affairs and issues concerning civil society. We have never ignored these issues and have always spoken about them in the spirit that corresponds to the strategic partnership between our countries.’ From the Russian side, it could be observed an effort to stress the relevance of the relationship with

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<sup>72</sup> The German-Russian bilateral relationship is also defined as a ‘strategic partnership’ by representatives of both countries.

Germany and Europe but also to show the rationality and respect of international law used to sustain the decision to oppose the Kosovarian declaration of independence:

‘[a]s for Kosovo and where there is a scenario by which we could agree to Kosovo’s independence, yes, such an option exists, but it lies exclusively within the bounds of international law. There is no need to be a great expert to understand that recognizing the independence of one of the territories that make up a sovereign state can only be done through a process of negotiation and with the agreement of all parties involved. If such a compromise were reached, we would of course agree with it.’

The war took place in August, but the problem of Georgian territorial integrity was a major issue of conflict between Russia and the Caucasian country since the first years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. However, it became a bomb about to explode after Mikhail Sakaashvili’s rise to power after the 2003 Rose Revolution and his promise to regain control of the regions that had broken away after the country’s independence. Many efforts were made to try to find a consensual and peaceful solution regarding the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but the intransigence of both sides did not allow this solution to be reached. In this context, the EU did not agree with how Russia was reacting regarding the issue. After a trip to Georgia in June 2008, the High Representative for the CFSP, Javier Solana, addressed the Council of the European Union and showed unpleasantness with Russia, reporting some decisions of the Russian government as ‘unwise’, since they did not contribute to the reduction of the tensions. Solana also used the opportunity to recall that the EU was attached to the respect of Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. On this issue, Russia and the EU were since the beginning on different sides.

During the night from 7 to 8 August 2008, a conflict ensued between Georgia and Russia. After the Georgian attack on the South Ossetian capital, Moscow reacted quickly and intensely. The Russian response was naturally not supported by the European Union. Interestingly, on the eve of the war, on 7 August, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, had published an article in the *Russia in Global Politics* magazine with the title *Russia and the World in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. In this article, Lavrov tried to highlight the common European heritage of Russia, to portray Russia as a rational actor and to stress the compatibilities between Russia and Europe:

‘[t]herefore, as it proclaims the aim of creating a socially oriented economy, the new Russia draws upon our common European legacy. Herein is one more proof of Russia’s compatibility with the rest of Europe. (...) We see nothing in our approach which would be contrary to the principles of rationalism, intrinsic to European’s attitude to the world. Acting differently means to pile up problems upon problems and make the future of Europe and of the entire Euro-Atlantic Region hostage to hasty and rash decisions. This would be a huge waste of time, resulting in a multitude of lost opportunities for joint action. We do not hurry anybody; we only urge all nations to think together about what awaits us.’

This attempt to create a new international image was challenged much earlier than expected. After the beginning of the Russian military operations critical declarations were



made. Poland and the Baltic States accused Russia of an imperial and revisionist policy and Russia was quickly in responding to these accusations in a strong tone. In a press conference at RIA Novosti news agency on 10 August, Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs (State Secretary) Grigory Karasin argued that ‘I leave it to you to judge the quality and timeliness of such a statement, but I want to say that the most cynical and inopportune forms have apparently been found to express such an incomprehensible and illogical position.’

The conflict took place during the French Presidency of the European Council and the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, presented himself as the chief mediator of the crisis, trying to make the parties agree to a cease-fire. Russia and Georgia accepted Sarkozy’s six-point agreement on 12 August. The war was short, but many European leaders considered Russia’s reaction disproportionate. In fact it would prove a new challenge in the construction of a positive atmosphere for the ‘strategic partnership’. As mentioned in the previous section, the European institutions tried to quickly do their best to remove the negative impression of Russia left by the belligerent conflict in the European memory and resume the next step of cooperation according to the spirit of ‘strategic partnership’. But the short-term impact of the war on Russia’s image was clearly strong and Russia did what it could to dismiss this bad impression and the possible negative impact it could have on the relationship with the EU.

In an interview published on *Rossya Weekly* on 14 August, State Secretary Grigory Karasin argued that ‘truth, as everybody well knows, is born in controversy. And there is nothing terrible in that originally our western partners had a different position and a different vision of the situation surrounding Georgia.’ This was a clear effort to signalize that partners might disagree and that there was no reason to put in question the ‘strategic partnership’ with the EU. But that did not mean European leaders would not keep criticizing Russia’s posture. After the war, German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited Russia again and talked to president Medvedev. In a joint press conference on 15 August in Sochi, Ms. Merkel criticized Russia’s treatment to the problem in blunt words:

‘(...) even when you take into account Russia’s description of the situation, I would still say that Russia’s reaction has been disproportionate, and that the presence of military forces in the very heart of Georgian territory is wrong. Therefore the immediate implementation of the six principles agreed to is urgently needed so that Russian troops will withdraw from the territory of Georgia. I hope that there will be progress and that all parties sign the plan.’

During the press conference a question was also raised to both leaders about the consequences of the event for the bilateral relationship. It was asked to President Medvedev if he believed that the war would lead to a worsening in Russia’s relations with the USA and the European Union, to which the Russian president replied:

‘[o]f course we do not want any worsening in relations, either long term or short term. On the contrary, we want full-fledged development of relations with the European Union and with individual European countries, and also with the United States of America and other countries. (...) For our part, we are ready to work with everyone openly and in goodwill, and we do not want to damage our relations with anyone. But at the same time, we will continue to carry out our peacekeeping mandate, and if anyone continues to attack our citizens and our peacekeepers, of course we will respond just as we responded on this occasion, and there should be no doubt about this.’

This was an interesting answer since it clearly showed that although Russia cherished good relations with its Western partners, the government stood for the necessity of the conflict and even warned for similar responses in case of a repetition of the scenario. That demonstrated that Russia understood the bilateral relationships with international partners as important, but national interests had priority. On the other hand, questioned by a possible reconsideration of Russian-German and European-Russian relations, the German Chancellor replied that:

‘[o]f course, events have changed our agenda. Of course there’s no question about that. Today we would have talked entirely different topics, if it were not for this conflict. The same thing is happening in the European Union, and it will be the same in regard to NATO and with other bodies. That means that finding a solution to this conflict has to be the subject of our discussions. (...) For example, I think that the European Union with the visit by Nicolas Sarkozy and the development of this six principle plan, taking into account what the U.S. Secretary of State also contributes today in her visit to Tbilisi – all this suggests that our cooperation will continue.’

In a well-balanced answer, Ms. Merkel honestly admitted that the episode could not be ignored and would not be forgotten, but that with an agreed solution, cooperation with Russia would certainly resume. This is a good example of how both leaders used their speeches to try to control the situation. Russia showed that it was convinced it was right and did not regret of its attitude, while the European representative stated she did not accept Russia’s behavior, which was not good for the bilateral relationship, but argued that cooperation would still be possible if Russia would follow the plan developed by the European partners.

However, the crisis was not completely solved. Despite the signs from the EU and other Western partners that this decision would be considered a mistake and an act of provocation, the Russian Federation recognized on 26 August the independences of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. On the same day President Medvedev was interviewed by CNN in Sochi and during this interview he was questioned about his decision and if that should be interpreted as a ‘direct challenge to the West.’ The Russian president answered that:

‘[n]o this is not a challenge, this is a well thought out decision. (...) And for us to take this step was the only way we could prevent further bloodshed, prevent further escalation of the conflict, and to prevent the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians. (...) Our colleagues said more than once that Kosovo was a *casus sui generis*, a special case. But in that case, we can also say that South Ossetia and Abkhazia are also *sui generis*.’

Hence, it can be observed that Medvedev again tried to show that Russia was a rational actor. The decision was the by-product of reasonable calculation and should not be criticized by the West in face of the similitude of the situation with the previous episode of Kosovo

independence, which was recognized by most international political actors who were criticizing the independence of the two territories. Medvedev also affirmed that Russia was wishing to have ‘full-value constructive relationships’ with its western partners, but that the construction of a relationship in these terms needed a ‘dose of pragmatism and mutual respect.’

Also on an interview on 26 August, but to TF1 Television, Dmitry Medvedev was questioned about the usage of South Ossetian and Abkhazian independences as a way to get revenge from Western parties because of the independence of Kosovo. The interviewer made reference to a previous declaration of the former Russian president Vladimir Putin that the recognition of Kosovo was a ‘boomerang’ that ‘could come back and hit you on the head.’ Medvedev naturally dismissed the idea of getting back at the Western partners but argued that: ‘[e]ven if it were a boomerang it would be better that it didn’t come back, but now that what has happened has happened, we are going to have to live with it.’ Furthermore, in an interview to the TV Channel Russia Today, Medvedev argued in a defying tone that it was up to the Western partners to let the Russian recognition to become a problem or not:

‘[w]e are not afraid of anything, including the prospects of a new Cold War. Of course we don’t want that. In such a situation everything depends on the stance of our partners in the international community and our partners in the West. If they want to maintain good relations with Russia, they will understand the reason for our decision, and the situation will remain calm. If they choose a confrontational scenario, well, we have lived in different conditions, and we can manage it.’

Actually even if the Russian president tried to deny the rationale of the Russian recognition as a revenge for Kosovo, Russian representatives constantly used Kosovo’s example to legitimize their decision and to oppose any criticism. Even before the decision had been implemented, in a press statement following negotiations with Sarkozy on 12 August, this understanding was already present in Medvedev’s discourse:

‘[y]ou were right in asking if the Ossetians and Abkhazians can and want to live within Georgia. This is a question for them to ask of themselves and is they who will give their own clear answer. It is not for Russia or any other country to answer this question for them. This is something that must take place in strict accordance with international law. Though, over these last years international law has given us numerous very complicated cases of peoples exercising their right to self-determination and the emergence of new states on the map. Just look at the example of Kosovo.’

The Russian justification certainly did not please the European leaders. After the relatively positive outcome of the acceptance of Sarkozy’s six-point agreement, South Ossetian and Abkhazian recognition gave more fuel to the critics of the EU-Russian relationship. Even those who were working intensively for a change of perception about Russia in Europe felt obliged to express their regret. On 10 September, Javier Solana addressed the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament and stated that: ‘[L]et me repeat once again, we strongly disagree with Russia over the status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. We have strongly condemned Russia’s recognition, which has now led to the establishment of diplomatic

relations between Moscow and Sukhumi and Tskhinvali.’ With regard to the Russian attempt to compare the Georgian case with Kosovo, Mr. Solana clearly rejected such comparisons. For the High Representative for the CFSP, the case was very different, since in Kosovo there had been UN administration of the issue, several rounds of negotiation and in-depth discussions held ‘in the spirit of compromise’ and without any military action.

EU representatives were not the only ones to express publicly their discontent with the recognition issue. After the Russian announcement on 26 August many Member States complained about the Russian position, among them the British government. British Foreign Secretary, David Miliband highlighted the disproportionate Russian action in Georgia and regretted the setback it represented for a solution to the territorial integrity problem of the Caucasian country. He urged Western partners to review initiatives of cooperation with Russia in several international governance forums. On that critical manifestation of the British government, commented Sergey Lavrov in Kiev on 27 August:

‘(...) probably the most interesting thing is what action options by the West he suggests. Here is a point which I would like to note specifically. David Miliband declares the need to review relations with Russia in international institutions, mentioning the G8, the Russia-Nato Council, Russia-EU relations and Russia’s upcoming entry into the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. I can say only one thing: Russia is interested in partnership in these and other structures to the same extent that our western colleagues are interested in this. The trouble is that a tendency has recently begun to show itself in the G8 and in the Russia-NATO Council and in our relations with the EU, when a bloc is built against Russia.’

Thus Russian responses to its critics were to reinforce its desire for partnership with Western partners and again position itself as the victim. This is an interesting feature of Russian political discourse in any crisis situation. On the one hand, one can observe many direct and strong declarations showing an interest in demonstrating Russia’s self-assertiveness, strength and independence; on the other hand Russian presidents consistently positioned themselves as the misunderstood party, the victims of a negative tendency towards Russia that permeates the European environment. It could be said that this tendency of preconceived rejection is a reality, but what the Georgian War and other examples show is that the Russian representatives simply ignored the fact that this rejection was also a by-product of the Russian actions and discourse.

To conclude this discussion of a crisis in the history of EU-Russian relations, one may wonder the impact it had on the terms of the ‘strategic partnership’. In this sense, it could be argued that the Russian posture was pretty clever. Believing to have leverage enough to assure that the episode would not be enough to put the bilateral relationship with the EU at risk, the Russian government boldly sustained the necessity of a military response and managed to declare the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Meanwhile, the official discourse purported that this was not an act of revenge or aggression and that it was Europe’s role not to

let it affect the 'strategic partnership'. During the above-mentioned interview with FT1 Television on August 26, Mr. Medvedev maintained that:

'I do not want any Cold War. It gave humanity nothing but problems. We will do everything we can to avoid this, but the ball is in Europe's court now, and if they want to worsen relations, they will of course achieve this. If they want to preserve our strategic relations – and I think this is absolutely in the interests of both Russia and Europe – then everything will be normal.'

In face of the recognition problem, the European leaders decided to meet in an Extraordinary European Council Meeting on 1 September. Nevertheless, Russian representatives were certain of the high costs of any European reprimand over Russia. On September 2, Sergey Lavrov argued that:

'[o]ur cooperation is mutually advantageous, and the mutual advantage is so great that it would be imprudent to put all this in jeopardy, to say the least. For our part, we are disposed towards constructive and equal interaction and continued dialogue on all themes, including those on which our positions do not coincide. Actually that's how it should be between partners.'

In this remark, Mr. Lavrov was certain that the European Union could not risk a worsening of relations with Russia. And the Russian Foreign Minister used this position of power to stress the terms of the 'strategic partnership' desired by Russia: 'constructive and equal interaction'. In another statement made at a Joint Press Conference following talks with Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ursula Plassnik, on 9 September, Mr. Lavrov would furthermore argue that '[w]e are convinced that our partnership with the EU should not and cannot be hostage to difference in approaches to this or that specific question.' And this is indeed what happened. As mentioned in the previous section, despite the strong noise generated by the war in August and September 2008, the topic was progressively neutralized not to influence the potential of cooperation for the 'strategic partnership'. That does not mean that the episode was erased in the collective memory of European representatives, or among the broader audience. It still integrates the history of the bilateral relationship and has an impact on the image of Russia as a strategic partner. Nevertheless, supported by a European Commission eager to develop the bilateral relationship to its full potentiality, the episode did not remain as a crisis issue in the bilateral agenda for a long time, at least not as an insurmountable obstacle to the legitimization of the EU-Russia 'strategic partnership'.

In summary, the conflicting episodes point to three important aspects of the historical development of the EU-Russia relations. Firstly, it can be observed that in each episode the complaints and criticisms of European Member States grew stronger. At the same time, the tone of Russia's responses also increased. Meanwhile, the representatives of the European institutions can be seen as 'firemen', responsible for controlling the heat caused by episodes of bilateral confrontation and the maintenance of an atmosphere supportive of a legitimate 'strategic partnership'. Secondly, Russia is seen in a constant dilemma between an effort to

sustain an image of strength and self-assertiveness and the necessity to prove that it was a rational political actor whose behavior was based on a set of European values. Hence, at the same time that Russia wanted to show the world how unique it was, it also aimed to demonstrate that it was part of Europe and not as different as other European countries. Thirdly, by comparing the two Chechen Wars with the Georgian War, it is clear how Russia used the political talk to express the desire of a different ‘strategic partnership’. And the major change claimed by Russia, was the transformation of the relationship in a relation between equals. Furthermore, it is obvious that Russia was aware of the relevance of this relationship for the European Union and used this knowledge to its advantage. It could actually be said that Russia did not only claim for change in the terms of the ‘strategic partnership’, it actually succeeded in modifying the rules of the relationship. Episodes like the Georgian War show that Russia knows its leverage on the EU and uses it to achieve its foreign policy goals while preserving the relationship in comfortable terms for Russian interests.

### **5.3 Framing the EU-Russia Relationship as a ‘Strategic Partnership’: Constitutive and Normative Consequences**

The goal of the present chapter was to tell the story of the EU-Russia relations with a focus on the different texts – documents, speeches and declarations – through which this bilateral relationship has been framed and constituted. This analysis was achieved with the aim of understanding how the term ‘strategic partnership’ is employed in a particular way and infused with specific meanings within the linguistic environment of the EU-Russia relations.

From what I have discussed, the first conclusion to be drawn is that the EU-Russia relationship can be understood as the constant dispute between two discourses based on different perspectives concerning the degree of compatibility of the parties and their possibility to frame their relationship in cooperative terms. Thus there is a clash between the discourse of ‘incompatibilities’ and the discourse of ‘positive cooperation’, which permeates all the phases of the EU-Russia relations. This opposition can be observed in many dichotomies, e.g. ‘trust x distrust’, ‘convergence x divergence’, ‘dividing lines x rapprochement’, ‘agreement x disagreement’. In this context, Belokurova’s (2011, p. 117) analysis rings true when she argues that ‘[t]he strategic partnership concept was developed due to both the mutual understanding of the necessity to cooperate and the permanent political conflicts and crises, which resulted from the mismatch of interests and values’. It was the perception of these dilemmas by the European

and Russian audiences – foreign policy-makers and policy analysts included – that supported the clash between a discourse of ‘positive cooperation’ and a discourse of ‘incompatibilities’.

There is the possibility of establishing four phases in the discursive interaction between the EU and Russia. The first phase, in which the term ‘strategic partnership’ had not yet been introduced, starts with the beginning of the bilateral relations between the Russian Federation and the European Communities and ends at the end of the 1990s. The most relevant text in this period is the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement*, which framed the bilateral relationship in terms of mutually beneficial cooperation but through which the parties were positioned with an unequal status. Russia was positioned as the country, which had to accept changes, and the EU was the model to be followed. In this phase the EU tried to direct Russia’s politico-economic developments and Russia had few opportunities to disagree with this relational architecture, e.g. the Kosovo War. One of the few exceptions was the First Chechen War.

In the years 1999-2000 the EU-Russia relations started being defined as a ‘strategic partnership’ and the asymmetrical model of relationship started being questioned. However, this was a transitional phase. Claims for a relationship based on equality and a repositioning of the parties were accompanied by demands for Russia to remain on the path towards the implementation of changes desired by the EU. Hence, there were different views regarding the ‘meaning’ of ‘strategic partnership’. But at this time, the EU’s understanding was the first choice and in a moment of relative weakness, Russia had difficulties to speak up and convince its European interlocutors to take the ‘strategic partnership’ as a relationship between equals.

The year 2004-2005 opens the transition to the third phase. The beginning of this new period coincided with the initial phase of Vladimir Putin’s second term as president of the Russian Federation and the adoption of a very assertive foreign policy discourse. It was the moment when Russia’s renewed politico-economic situation legitimized the claim for a ‘strategic partnership’ between equals and a reduced capability of the EU to control Russia’s agency. This was the moment in which the change in the ‘meaning’ of ‘strategic partnership’ made the European audience put in doubt the very basic possibility of a ‘real’ ‘strategic partnership’. The repositioning of the parties and the changes in the rules that were framing the EU-Russia relationship supported the discourse of incompatibilities and any episode of divergence between the parties was perceived as a crisis and as evidence that such a relationship was not and would never be a mutual beneficial cooperation based on the shared values of a Europe without dividing lines. In this context, both sides used all the opportunities they could to affirm that their relationship was, without any doubt, a ‘strategic partnership’. Nevertheless, it was clear that the European audience had a very hard time accepting this claim – as the 2004

Communication to the European Parliament and European Council showed – and episodes like the Russian-Georgian War and the gas disputes between Russia and the Ukraine were potentially disturbing events.

The years 2008 and 2009 with its crisis and new developments – e.g. when the Treaty of Lisbon became effective – were the start of a new phase. It began with non-consensual evaluations of the effectiveness of the ‘strategic partnership’ during the resolution of the Georgian crisis but quickly developed into a context in which the parties reaffirmed the existence of the ‘strategic partnership’ and started focusing on the positive results obtained. In addition, this phase was characterized by a different posture to deal with divergences. Russia and the EU were portrayed as ‘good friends’, who may fight on some occasions but who definitely care for each other and aim at good relations. They are different but also neighbors, who genuinely share common goals and common values to a certain extent.

During these four phases there were visible attempts at repositioning by the partners, proposing different frameworks for the bilateral relationship and even suggesting different understandings of the term ‘strategic partnership’. Nevertheless, one of the main arguments of the present chapter regards the recurrent enunciation of the assertive speech act ‘the EU and Russia are (real) strategic partners’. Both sides made this speech act – the European Commission is certainly the main representative of this claim. In the second, third and fourth phases, independently of the different claims for a symmetrical or asymmetrical relationship and the existence or not of a crisis, the representatives of the Commission, of the European Council, and of the Russian government constantly repeated this mantra. This was one of the constitutive and normative uses of ‘strategic partnership’ in the context of the EU-Russia relations: to act against a discourse based on a fundamental incompatibility of values between both sides, something that is visible in the many considerations on a divided Europe, on Russia as part of Europe or not, on Russia’s ability to maintain *European values*.

It was argued mainly in the third phase that when faced with positive results and divergence in some issues, the European audience tended to focus on the divergences and ignore the positive results. This shows how the discourse of incompatibilities was and still is resilient in the relationship between the EU and Russia. This discourse – in the words of Mr. Barroso – ‘contaminates’ and ‘pollutes’ the bilateral linguistic environment and leads to a debate framed in terms that hinder the possibility of cooperation. In this context, ‘strategic partnership’ was the speech act constantly used to reject the discourse according to which cooperation and, from the European perspective, even the possibility to influence the internalization of European values in Russia, would be threatened.



At some point Vladimir Putin proposed the conduction of the bilateral relationship in a way that would avoid the debate to be framed in a 'friendly or foe' logic. And in fact the great obstacle within the EU-Russia relations was the fact that a linguistic environment informed all the phases of this relationship, which in turn reinforced this logic. In this context, the mantra 'we are strategic partners' was not an attempt at ignoring completely the divergences and episodes of conflict, but was a way not to allow these episodes to impede Russia and the EU to move on in their cooperation. By the same rationale of Fierke's 'acting as if' explanation of the end of the Cold War (see Chapter 1), the constant enunciation of the 'strategic partnership' speech act was an attempt at trying to convince the audience, or at least the EU and Russian foreign policy-makers, that a different logic of relationship, or rules of the game, was possible. The rationale of the discourse was that if Russia and the EU avoided their relations being trapped in this embedded logic, episodes of divergence would be not automatically reverted into crisis situations; they could be taken as simple disagreements, i.e. normal events between partners that cooperate. This is one clearly example of the normative function of 'strategic partnership'.

'Strategic partnership' was also used in a different way in the EU-Russia relations though. Therein reference is being made to what 'strategic partnership' means, i.e. what kind of relationship was constituted through the enunciation of this term. One of the most visible signs of dispute was in terms of 'asymmetry x symmetry'. When the term started to come into use, the European Union argued for a relationship in which the EU and Russia were positioned in asymmetrical terms. On the one hand, the EU was seen as the holder of values and a model to be followed with the right to direct the behavior of Russia; whereas Russia was perceived as the one to accept the leadership of the EU and adjust to the European core values. Russia was certainly not satisfied with these terms and proposed an understanding of 'strategic partnership' in which the participants were seen as equals. As already shown, the second meaning was progressively incorporated into the language of both actors, albeit with constant efforts of repositioning from both parties. In addition to that, other elements that constituted the 'meaning' of the EU-Russia 'strategic partnership' were *inter alia* the notion of 'positive interdependence' – the fact that there was a logic of mutual dependence between the parties and consequently the existence of shared goals, among them 'essential security interests' – the existence of a minimal degree of trust, the principle of 'pragmatism' attached to the respect of some basic core values – e.g. democratic principles, the acceptance of 'tactical differences', the notion of 'natural partners', and the claim about the 'immutability' of a bilateral relationship structured around regular 'political dialogue'. The many references made by European and

Russian representatives to the idea of ‘friendship’ as an element present in their relationship notwithstanding, I would not tend to see it as a constitutive element of how both sides understand a relationship of ‘strategic partnership’. The references to friendship were employed in a way to oppose the idea of enmity that permeates the EU-Russia linguistic environment. In that sense, friendship was not an element in the understanding of ‘strategic partnership’ as a form of relationship that the parties shared, but a reference in support of the discourse of ‘strategic partnership’ as the antipode of a discourse of incompatibilities and tendency to enmity.

In summary, it must be stressed that the use of ‘strategic partnership’ in the context of EU-Russia relations is connected to a resilient discourse about incompatibility of values. Since the end of the Cold War the bilateral relationship can be characterized by a clash of opinions between believers and non-believers in the possibility of cooperation between Russia and the EU. In this context, the EU foreign policy concentrated in reducing the focus on differences, trying to show that even if Russia had not fully incorporated the European values yet, the EU could make that happen. This strategy was evidently not successful and was progressively translated into an intensification of the dichotomy ‘rivalry x friendship’ and this was the background for the incorporation of ‘strategic partnership’ in the vocabulary of the bilateral relationship as a ‘pragmatic move’. Therein, this term can both be seen as part of a discourse against another discourse based on the belief in an essentially conflictive nature of EU-Russia relations – sustained by the incompatibility generated by a lack of common values – and as a speech act. As observed in many of the documents, speeches and interviews quoted in the chapter, ‘strategic partnership’ was sometimes an expression used in empty political rhetoric, but it was also an important label of demarcation of the bilateral relationship, and mostly important, it was the language used to constitute and reconstitute the terms of the game between Russia and the EU and to allow cooperation to remain a possibility. The examples of the Chechen and Georgian wars showed how both Russia and the EU were aware of the rules of the game, and that Russian leaders demonstrated a high level of political sensitivity to push European leaders to their limits and force a reconfiguration of the rules the game. From a hierarchy-based directive relationship, the relationship evolved – through the introduction of the notion of ‘strategic partnership’ – into a compromise-based association between equals. Despite the lingering mistrust, channels of cooperation are still open and, very differently from eighteen years ago when the PCA was signed, the relationship is conducted according to another terms: it cannot be characterized by the idea of ‘friendship’ but it is certainly more equitable.

And the idea and language used to frame and constitute this relationship as it is today was ‘strategic partnership’.

I conducted this analysis before the start of the serious crisis between the EU and Russia in the final months of 2013, and which remains unsolved. Russian aggression with respect to the territorial integrity of Ukraine inaugurated a new phase of the bilateral engagement between the EU and Russia. At present, the discourse of incompatibility is overshadowing the discourse of positive cooperation. The current High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms. Federica Mogherini, has recently stated that ‘Russia stays a strategic player in the regional and global challenges, [regardless if] we like it or not, but I don’t think it’s a strategic partner anymore’.<sup>73</sup> This statement cannot be ignored. It is an important speech act. It is the first time that a representative of the European Institutions proposes the end of the ‘strategic partnership’. In fact, if this statement is accepted by the audience it will certainly generate constitutive effects for the relationship between the EU and Russia. However, it is important to notice that amid all the mistrust and disbelief of the current scenario, it does not mean that the ‘strategic partnership’ between the EU and Russia was never a ‘real strategic partnership’. Analysts and foreign policy-makers should not forget the function that this concept had for the constitution of a framework of bilateral engagement that allowed the parties to achieve some goals, and, more importantly, to sustain a peaceful bilateral engagement for a significant period of time.

The current phase is perhaps the most complex in the recent history of EU-Russia relations. But other episodes were also extremely challenging. It should not be forgotten that the EU also introduced sanctions to Russia in the context of the Second Chechen War. The present scenario is certainly completely different from that episode. In any case, what is important to stress is that the current crisis does not confirm that authors like Krastev (2007) were right to point out that the EU and Russia would never be ‘real strategic partners’ because their relationship lacked the basic criteria for a ‘strategic partnership’ to emerge. In fact, the current scenario shows that the inability of the parties to act according to the rules of engagement agreed through the framework of ‘strategic partnership’ is taking them to an ever-deeper crisis.

In 2014 the German magazine *Der Spiegel* interviewed the German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen. On this occasion she openly stated that ‘Russia is currently not a partner.

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<sup>73</sup> ‘Mogherini: Russia is no longer the EU’s strategic partner’, *Euractiv*, <<http://www.euractiv.com/sections/global-europe/mogherini-russia-no-longer-eus-strategic-partner-308152>>, accessed on 5 November 2014.

Partners follow agreements. On the other hand the opposite is also true: Russia must not become our enemy.<sup>74</sup> Despite stating her belief that Russia was not acting as a partner she also argued that '[f]or that reason we have to do everything to allow Russia to return to politics of dialogue'.<sup>75</sup> These declarations from Ms. von der Leyen are important because they show that the solution proposed by the German government is exactly a return to the rules engagement that the EU and Russia had as strategic partners. In fact, she opposes analyses that claim that EU and Russia will never be able to cooperate due to a 'gap of values'. On the contrary, she argues that is through 'politics of dialogue' that the crisis might be to some extent overcome. In this context, it is again important to stress that disagreements and crises have been always an element in all the phases of bilateral engagement between Russia and the EU and it was through the notion of 'strategic partnership' that the parties were able to overcome these challenging episodes and sustain a cooperative relationship. It is too early to say what consequences the current crisis will have for the EU-Russia bilateral engagement, but it is important to stress that it does not erase the function of 'strategic partnership' as a constitutive framework for cooperation between the parties in the period analyzed in this chapter. In any case it is interesting to see how the inauguration of a new phase sustained by new rules of engagement is connected to a shift in language, as Ms. Mogherini and Ms. von der Leyen's statements reveal.

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<sup>74</sup> 'Russland ist derzeit kein Partner', *Der Spiegel*, no. 24, 2014. Free translation from German original.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

## 6 The Brazil-EU ‘Strategic Partnership’

Brazil and Europe are strongly connected by history. In 1500 Pedro Alvarez Cabral set foot on the Brazilian shores, and until 1822 Brazil remained under Portuguese rule. It then became a sovereign empire whose rulers were members of the Portuguese Royal House. In 1889 the country became a republic, but the European presence in the country remained visible through the cultural legacy left by the Europeans and through waves of immigration. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Italians, Germans, Spanish and Portuguese, among citizens of other European and non-European nationalities (eg. Africans, Japanese, Lebanese) settled in the country and helped shape the identity of Brazil and its citizens. Social, cultural and economic ties always connected Brazil and Europe and that common history was naturally converted in a benchmark for a cordial relationship between Brazil and the European Communities. However, despite the friendly relations and cooperative initiatives between the parties and the economic relevance of the bilateral relationship, it was not until the 2000s that the EU would target Brazil as a country with which a differentiated relationship should be developed. In 2007, and in a very particular context, the parties agreed to establish a ‘strategic partnership’.

This chapter discusses the meaning(s) of a ‘strategic partnership’ between Brazil and the EU. It must be said that the ‘strategic partnerships’ between the EU and Russia and the EU and Brazil are very different relationships. Although there are also some criticisms about the results of the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’ in the literature – e.g. Saraiva (2014) – there are no claims about gaps of values and incompatibilities between Brazil and the EU to the same degree as the EU-Russia literature. That does not mean that disagreements between the parties are non-existent, but the context in which the relationship was framed as a ‘strategic partnership’, the particular shared goals aimed by the parties, and the absence of major bilateral crises, constitute a relationship essentially based on cordiality. In fact, both policy-makers and analysts seem to agree that the achievements of the last years have been ‘positive’, although some improvements are necessary. There is no sign that the relationship will be one of conflict.

As in the previous chapter, I analyze the language enunciated by means of agreements, official documents, joint statements and speeches in order to discuss the historical context in which the concept of ‘strategic partnership’ was introduced and used to frame relations between the EU and Brazil. Thus I analyze to what extent these actors have made use of this expression as a ‘label’, as a constitutive instrument, and as a normative device. Moreover, it will be observed how particular adjectives like ‘natural partners’, ‘like-minded’, ‘friends’ and the ideas

of ‘common history’ and ‘shared values’ have been proposed as the basis of the ‘strategic partnership’ and have been shaping its terms.

As I have argued in the last few chapters, I assume that ‘meaning’ is not fixed and that ‘strategic partnership’ can be seen as an instrument through which actors position and reposition themselves within a bilateral relationship, reformulate and point out their interests and goals, and thus try to change the dynamics of their relations. Hence, the analyst should take into consideration the context in which a term is enunciated and how this meaning is submitted to change within a particular time frame. Brazil and the EU established their ‘strategic partnership’ in 2007 but have intensified their cooperation since the 1990s. It is thus necessary to approach the period previous to the moment in which ‘strategic partnership’ started being employed as the framework for EU-Brazil relations to understand that the use of this language meant an important change in the bilateral relationship.

This chapter starts with an analysis of the EU-Brazil relationship in the context of the *Framework Agreement for Cooperation between the European Economic Community and the Federative Republic of Brazil* (1992) and other agreements signed by the parties, and which preceded the ‘strategic partnership’. Then I analyze the joint statements, speeches and documents from 1992 to January 2013, when the sixth EU-Brazil Summit was held. The chapter will have a main section, which will be divided into sub-sections corresponding to the different phases of the EU-Brazil bilateral relationship in the chosen time frame. It must be stressed that the history of EU-Brazil relations will not be dealt with in detail. The focus will remain on selected documents and statements through which the understanding of the parties regarding their ‘strategic partnership’ has been developed. The following section will briefly discuss some challenges of the EU-Brazil relations and how they can be understood within the ‘strategic partnership’ framework. Some concluding remarks will be presented in the final section. The main argument discussed in this chapter is that although one can observe a slight sense of hierarchy and asymmetry in the EU-Brazil relationship, Brazil is not a passive interlocutor. Although the efforts of positioning and repositioning made by the parties are much more discrete and less conflicting when compared to the EU-Russia relationship, the relationship is still characterized by mixed results – achievements and disagreements – and, in a context of enduring European crisis and further Brazilian economic and political ascension, it is possible that the terms of the bilateral relationship change in the next years.

## 6.1 Framing a Brazil-EU ‘Strategic Partnership’

### 6.1.1 The ‘Partnership’ in the 1990s and early 2000s: Brazil limited to a Regional Scope

In the beginning of the 1990’s South America was still experiencing the transition from the military dictatorial regimes which started to collapse in the 1980s to democracy. That was also the case in Brazil. After the end of the *ditadura* in 1985, Fernando Collor de Mello was the first president elected by direct popular vote in 1989. After the debt crisis and hyperinflation that hindered economic development in the 1980s, Brazil found itself in the 1990s in the middle of a delicate process of political transition and restoration of its economy. Change was not limited to internal affairs however. In 1991, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay signed the *Asuncion Treaty*, which created the Mercosur, in an effort to promote economic growth and strengthen the region’s position in the international market. It was in this context that in 29 June 1992, just a few months before President Collor de Mello’s impeachment, that Brazil and the European Economic Community signed a *Framework Agreement for Cooperation*.

The agreement, which became effective on 1 November 1995, focused mainly on bilateral economic cooperation. It established the status of most-favored nation between the contracting parties and defined some goals for their economic cooperative initiative. According to article 3,

‘(...) the aims of such cooperation shall be in particular: (a) generally to step up and diversify economic links between them; (b) to contribute to the sustainable development of their economies and standards of living; (c) to promote the expansion of trade in order to achieve diversification and open up new markets; (d) to encourage the flow of investment, the transfer of technology and strengthen the protection of investment; (e) to promote cooperation between economic operators, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises; (f) to establish conditions conducive to job-creation; (g) to protect and improve the environment; (h) to encourage rural development measures; (i) to strengthen the scientific foundation and capacity for innovation of the Contracting Parties; (j) to support efforts and initiatives for regional integration.’

In fact, the agreement was not a real milestone in the Brazil-EU relationship. One should recall that this was not only a transitional moment for Brazil. At the same time the Member States of the European Communities were dealing with a process that would end up some months later with the signing of the *Maastricht Treaty*. The EU was being institutionally shaped, thus relations with Brazil were not a priority. For Brazil, the agreement was the chance to strengthen the bonds with a major economic partner and for the EU it was the opportunity to be to some extent active in the process of political transition in Brazil and to consolidate economic cooperation. In the preamble of the agreement the parties stressed ‘the friendly relations and traditional links’, ‘the importance they attach to the principles of the United Nations Charter, to democratic values and to respecting human rights’, ‘their common will to

expand and diversify trade between them and to step up cooperation in trade, economic matters, science and technology and financial matters’, and ‘the positive consequences of the process of reform, modernization of the economy and liberalization of trade in Brazil for trade and economic relations between the Parties’. Similar to the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* signed between the EU and Russia in 1994, the EU was interested in assuring that Brazil would become a stable democracy and a market economy. The major difference is that the traditionally good relations between Brazil and Europe could be used to sustain the notion of a relationship based on ‘friendship’. In any case, the European Economic Community acted as it did with Russia: it tried to use the agreement to influence how Brazil should develop as a state. Article 1 of the agreement accentuated the ‘democratic basis for cooperation’ between Brazil and the EC by stating that ‘[c]ooperation ties between the Community and Brazil and this Agreement in its entirety are based on respect for the democratic principles and human rights which inspire the domestic and international policies of both the Community and Brazil and which constitute an essential component of this Agreement.’ The European Economic Community had a clear agenda towards Brazil and the idea was to use its political and economic status to have an influence on the politico-economic development of a country that could become an ever more important partner of the EU in South America.

In fact, at the start this bilateral relationship was clearly asymmetrical. In a round-table with members of the European Parliament on 14 September 1995, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso defined the relationship as a ‘partnership’ based in economic interests: ‘the expressive trade and investment volume between the European Union and Brazil constitute a solid basis for our partnership’.<sup>76</sup> But the same day, in a lunch offered by the President of the European Commission Jacques Santer, Cardoso also stressed the ‘enduring process of convergence between Brazil and the European Union’<sup>77</sup> and ‘the friendship that unites us to each one of its members’.<sup>78</sup> More importantly, the Brazilian President argued that ‘we are creating a sum of positive factors, which turn Brazil into an attractive and reliable partner. It is in this context that the perspective of a deepening partnership with Brazil is becoming possible’.<sup>79</sup> From this moment Brazil fought for the European Union’s recognition. The EU has interests in maintaining a partnership and good relations with Brazil, but it was the latter that depended mostly on the consolidation of this relationship. The Brazilian government wanted to use the relationship with the European Union to push its own economic growth.

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<sup>76</sup> Free translation from the original Portuguese text.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



The European strategy on South America – initially the European Economic Community’s strategy and later the European Union’s – was to have a regional focus instead of choosing to have a ‘special relationship’ with any particular country. Although Brazil was already the biggest economy in the region at this time, and an important partner of the EU, the absence of a consolidated regional leadership and lack of global projection capability of the country did not justify any special treatment for Brazil. On the other hand Mercosur, as an integration process inspired in the EU model, was perceived as the ideal link between the EU and the whole region. In this context, the EU chose to focus on an agreement with the Mercosur that would promote interregional convergence and could be later used as the first step towards a deeper form of association. On 15 December 1995 the EU and Mercosur signed the *Interregional Framework Cooperation Agreement*. The agreement, which became effective on 1 July 1999, was created as a basic framework to regulate interregional relations, deepen economic cooperation and political dialogue and allow the beginning of negotiations for a future interregional association agreement. The EU was clearly showing that it wanted a regional approach to South America and, in regards to its relationship with Brazil, that it was just another country with which cooperation and good relations were desired and which did not deserve any special status. The Brazilian government understood this and accepted the priority given to cooperation through Mercosur. It was the natural path to follow in a context in which it was impossible for Brazil to achieve a status of leadership outside the regional scope. A relationship with the EU that could help develop the regional bloc was thus much desired.

Hence the relationship between Brazil and the EU in the 1990s was defined as a ‘partnership’. There were no major disagreements between the parties and from this moment on the references to a ‘common history’ and ‘shared values’ could be observed. The goals shared by Brazil and the EU were mostly economic, and there was a recognized hierarchy between the parties. In this context, the declarations of the Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso stating the necessity for Brazil to show its liability to become a more attractive partner to move cooperation with the EU ahead, demonstrated the position of inferiority accepted by Brazil in the bilateral relationship. Moreover, the signing of the *Interregional Framework Agreement* between the EU and Mercosur showed that the EU aimed to establish its presence in South America and wished to create an intensified channel of cooperation with Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, but without defining any priority partner. Interestingly, this logic is inverted in the following years. After the unsuccessful results of the negotiations on the EU-Mercosur association agreement, which were paralyzed in 2004, and the further ascension of Brazil as a global actor, the EU tried to reach an agreement with

Mercosur through a 'strategic partnership' with Brazil. In fact, the 'strategic partnership' joint action plans point out that the EU-Brazil bilateral collaboration were meant to allow the EU-Mercosur associate to reach some agreement.

There were not many changes to the EU-Brazil relationship until the end of the second mandate of President Cardoso in 2001. That does not mean that the decisions made by President Cardoso would not influence the period initiated after the end of his administration when Brazil would attain more relevance on the international stage. During his presidency the economy stabilized through the *Plano Real*<sup>80</sup> and Brazil became a member of the G-20 (founded in 1999). However, the rise into power of President Luis Inacio 'Lula' da Silva in 2002, initiated a new phase in the history of the country and inaugurated a new and more emblematic presence of Brazil in the international scene. President Lula became known not only by the expansion of social programs that removed an important number of Brazilian citizens from extreme poverty (some of them initiated by the previous president) and promoted economic growth but also by his efforts to transform Brazil in a global actor through a strong presidential foreign policy.<sup>81</sup>

President Lula's foreign policy did not deny the relevance of the relationship with more traditional partners like Europe and the US, but it certainly tried to promote new foreign policy guidelines. Already in his first mandate, President Lula emphasized his desire to deepen South American integration beyond economic integration. It was in this context that the notion of *Mercosur social* gained momentum. He also stressed the necessity of strengthening south-south cooperation and promoted the image of Brazil as a leadership in the developing world. He made an effort to establish stronger diplomatic ties with African countries and to develop new initiatives of cooperation between Brazil and the new emerging markets, like IBSA and BRICS. Despite all that, the EU remained a high priority partner. The EU was Brazil's main trade and investment partner and it was important for the Brazilian diplomacy to try to develop a new and intensified relationship with the EU. It was certainly an important step considering the changes in the Brazilian foreign policy discourse in the first half of the 2000s, which was more assertive and aimed to turn Brazil into a global player. Brazil was not to be seen as just another country in South America anymore and a reevaluation of the status of the relationship with the EU was in order.

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<sup>80</sup> A strategy of monetary policy to stabilize the currency and consolidate the country's macroeconomic foundations.

<sup>81</sup> Brazilian foreign policy was traditionally conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was always considered to act autonomously to the Presidency. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was always taken as a strong figure and the one who decided on the strategic guidelines of the country's foreign policy. President da Silva changed this tradition by taking foreign policy into his own hands. This brought more international visibility to the country. Nowadays, President Rouseff is often criticized for not engaging herself enough in the conduction of foreign policy.

On 19 January 2004, Brazil and the EU signed an *Agreement for Scientific and Technological Cooperation*. The signing of the agreement, which became effective only on 7 August 2007 (actually after the establishment of the ‘strategic partnership’ in July 2007), was positive for bilateral relations but did not generate any change in the terms of the rules that regulated and constituted the relationship. Article 1 stated the purpose of the agreement: ‘[t]he Parties shall encourage, develop and facilitate cooperative activities in areas of common interest by carrying out and supporting scientific and technological research and development activities.’ Even in the preamble no reference was made to the historical links and shared values between Brazil and the EU. The brief text got straight to the point, specifying areas of possible scientific cooperation, regulating some practical organizational issues and approaching some details like funding.

Bilateral relations followed their course without much change until the end of the first ‘Lula’ administration. However, as of the beginning of the President’s second mandate, Brazil already occupied a different place in the international scene. The country had reached a leadership status in relevant international forums like the G-20 and the WTO; it had participated in the United Nations Mission for the Stabilization of Haiti (MINUSTAH); it had accumulated since 1999 sustainable GDP growth, and the country displayed a stronger effort to take on regional leadership in South America. Brazil had been presented as one of the BRIC countries in the report of Goldman Sachs in 2001 and the new developments of the following years and solid economic and diplomatic results were showing that the country would in fact become a more relevant actor on a global scale. It was in this context that a moment was reached in which both Brazil and the EU realized that some changes were necessary in the terms of their bilateral relationship. The proposal of a new framework was closely attached to material elements and the perceptions of growth of Brazil. However the necessity of change and the acknowledgement of a new status would be communicated and implemented through language. It is this context that the use of ‘strategic partnership’ becomes meaningful and is worth the analysis.

### ***6.1.2 Brazil becomes a Candidate for a ‘Strategic Partnership’***

In December 2005 the European Commission adopted the communication *A stronger partnership between the European Union and Latin America*. Although it focused on Latin America more broadly, this document was mentioned in the *Brazil Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013*, adopted on 14 May 2007, as a first step in the acknowledgement that the EU-Brazil engagement should be rethought. The *Country Strategy Paper* recalled the statements of the

2005 document in which it underscored the ‘growing influence’ of Brazil and stated that ‘1) Brazil warrants a special treatment because its important role in regional affairs and that 2) the fact that the EU has only the bare bones of bilateral dialogue with Brazil with no political dimension is no longer appropriate in view of Brazil’s rapid development as a global economic and political player’.<sup>82</sup> The European Commission argued in the 2007 *Country Strategy Paper* that it also recognized that, since 2005, Brazil was not the same country and that this new reality had to be taken into consideration.

The *Brazil Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013* became the first official step in the year 2007 in preparation for the establishment of the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’, which would take place in July. The strategy paper highlighted the necessity of a ‘new approach’ and that the document’s function was to ‘stimulate exchanges, contacts and transfer of know-how between the EC [European Commission] and Brazil’. It also stated that ‘primary objectives of these exchanges’ were to ‘provide valuable input for improving social inclusion and achieving greater equality in Brazil and improving mutual knowledge in a number of areas of specific interest and to enhance bilateral EC-Brazil relations’. The document also aimed at generating the ‘positive impact’ of raising ‘the EC’s profile in Brazil and vice-versa’.

Indeed this *Country Strategy Paper* was a long analytical review of Brazil in its political, social, cultural and economic dimensions elaborated for European readers. It is a good picture of how the EU saw Brazil at the time and thus important for understanding the context in which the bilateral relationship was being changed. The EU portrayed Brazil as a ‘stable democracy with room for further improvement, an emerging political power on both the regional and international scenes, a stabilised and growing economic power, still an unequal society, although social indicators have improved over the past few years, and a country with a rich but fragile environment.’

It was in this context that the Commission made reference in the document to the article 177 of the Treaty establishing the European Community to frame the approach to Brazil. The strategy paper still presented cooperation with Brazil as part of its ‘community policy on development cooperation’ that should foster ‘sustainable economic and social development of developing countries’, ‘smooth and gradual integration of developing countries into the world economy’ and ‘the campaign against poverty in developing countries’. It can be observed in the *Brazil Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013* thus that there was to some extent a contradiction in the terms through which the Commission recognized on the one hand the growth of Brazil and the necessity of a new approach to this country and on the other hand mentioned the fragility of the country and the necessity of the EU helping it, through ‘development cooperation’, to

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<sup>82</sup> *Brazil Country Strategy Paper 2007-1013*, 2007.

achieve success in the combat against poverty and to make Brazil become part of the world economy. The document stressed the fragilities of Brazil and positioned it as if it were experiencing a moment of truth in which EU's help was perceived as fundamental to allow this developing country to overcome such a status.

Even if the *Country Strategy Paper* presented an asymmetrical relationship between Brazil and the EU, just a couple of weeks later a new document was released by the European Commission, which clearly showed what kind of relationship it envisioned for the EU and Brazil. In 30 May 2007 the *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – Towards an EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership* was disclosed and inaugurated a new phase in the Brazil-EU relationship. According to the *Communication* '[t]he time has come to look at Brazil as a strategic partner as well as a major Latin American economic actor and regional leader.' In the document the European Commission presented an extensive and detailed justification for promoting this reformulation of the terms of the bilateral relationship. First, the document stressed Brazil's new status as a 'global leader' and as a 'champion of the developing world in the UN and at the WTO' and argued that '[t]he proposed strategic partnership between Brazil and EU should help Brazil in exercising positive leadership globally and regionally and to engage with the EU in a global, strategic, substantial and open dialogue both bilaterally and in multilateral and regional fora.' Shared 'core values and interests, including respect for the rule of law and human rights, concern about climate change and the pursuit of economic growth and social justice at home and abroad' were used to justify Brazil's position as a 'vital ally for the EU in addressing these and other challenges in international fora.' The document mentioned Brazil's size, population and economic development to argue that the country was a 'natural leader in South America and a key player in Latin America.' In the *Communication* the European Commission also pointed out the EU's 'priority strategic objective' of establishing a 'wider strategic association' between the EU and Mercosur' and that Brazil's 'positive leadership' could make negotiations move ahead. Finally, the document presented Brazil as a 'major EU investment hub in Latin America and a market that will offer major additional openings for EU business.' Moreover, the European Commission highlighted the country's 'huge natural resources, renowned scientific and academic excellence, broad industrial diversity and a vast internal market.'

Interestingly about this document is that the European Commission alone stated the necessity to change the terms of the bilateral relationship, ascending the global status of Brazil and thus modifying the rules that framed their cooperation. Naturally one should take into consideration that the Brazilian government was not caught by surprise. There were

consultations between Brazilian diplomats and the European Commission about the Commission's proposal. In any case, it was a document elaborated by the Commission and expressing the voice of this institution. Thus it is remarkable how the document presented a picture from Brazil that had shifted from treating Brazil as a member of the Mercosur, i.e. as just one developing country in South America.

With regard to what the 'strategic partnership' would mean and represent the Commission stated that:

'[a] strategic partnership with Brazil, a long standing friend and ally in a region of great importance to the EU, would imply building consensus and agreements on broader political co-operation to promote peace and stability in our respective continents and further afield, and would enable us to pool our efforts to tackle the global challenges that confront us. It would mean assuming a co-operative approach on economic and trade relations and making progress in the sectors identified for co-operation. It would also involve a strong commitment to regional integration, enhancing our co-operation with Mercosur and seeking successful conclusion of the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement. An EU-Brazil strategic partnership would, in conclusion, represent a very positive step forward for the EU, for Brazil and for the region as a whole.'

Thus the European Commission characterized the relationship with Brazil as a partnership that had relevance in a bilateral, interregional and global scope. The strategic partnership meant the possibility of bilateral cooperation between 'friends' and 'allies' in a micro and in a macro scale. Furthermore, the Commission argued that the EU should 'engage with Brazil to launch a strategic partnership at the EU-Brazil Summit in Lisbon' and 'invite Brazil to submit its own views on the scope of the strategic partnership.' In the document the Commission already delineated the topics that should be the object of renewed relationship with Brazil: strengthening multilateralism; raising human rights standards, fostering democracy and governance; achieving the millennium development goals and promoting regional and social development; protecting the environment; strengthening energy cooperation; enhancing Latin America's stability and prosperity; advancing the Mercosur agenda; reinforcing trade and economic relations; justice, freedom and security; and bringing people together. In any case, it is important to stress that the Commission emphasized the idea of a process of cooperation that should be shared and developed jointly by both parties.

### ***6.1.3 The First EU-Brazil Summit***

Less than two months after the disclosure of the Commission's *Communication* to the Parliament, the first EU-Brazil summit took place. This was a very special occasion for EU-Brazil relations and for understanding the new terms of this relationship. On 4 July 2007, representatives of the Brazilian government and of the EU met in Lisbon, and EU-Brazil relations were officially established as a 'strategic partnership'. The summit and its results

should be understood as the by-product of a very special context. There was a new global perception that Brazil was becoming a more relevant actor in the international system. As previously mentioned, Brazil and Portugal share historical socio-cultural bonds that are still preserved. Thus the fact that the President of the European Commission was Mr. Barroso, a Portuguese citizen, and that Portugal had just assumed the Presidency of the European Union, created the perfect context to allow consultations that would culminate in the ‘strategic partnership’. In fact, both Brazilian representatives and Mr. Barroso himself acknowledge the importance that this special conjuncture had for the realization of the summit and for the reformulation of the terms of the bilateral relationship that were agreed at the meeting. In the press conference after the Summit, President Lula recognized that ‘it was necessary that Portugal rose into power in the European Union for this summit to turn into reality.’<sup>83</sup> Some years later, in a ceremony in Brasilia in 2013, Mr. Barroso proudly took the credit for insisting on the idea of establishing a ‘strategic partnership’ between Brazil and the EU: ‘I am proud of having proposed five years ago the establishment of a strategic partnership between the European Union and Brazil when some people still had doubts about the importance of Brazil in the international context.’<sup>84</sup>

It was in this particular context that the parties met in Lisbon and released an *EU-Brazil Summit Joint Statement* explaining the framework for their future relations. Article 3 was probably the most important excerpt of the document because it was where one could read that the parties officially established a relationship conceptualized as a ‘strategic partnership’ and could observe the elements used to justify such a relationship and the goals that would be jointly pursued. This article stressed the ‘close historical, cultural and economic ties’ as well as the shared ‘fundamental values and principles’ like ‘democracy, rule of law, promotion of human rights and basic freedoms and a market-based economy’. In this sense, this could be considered a very similar use of the reference to values as it could be found in the documents that frame the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’. But article 3 goes on and argues that:

‘[b]oth sides agree on the need to identify and promote common strategies to tackle global challenges, including in peace and security issues, democracy and human rights, climate change, biodiversity, energy security and sustainable development, fight against poverty and exclusion. They also agree on the importance of complying with obligations under existing international disarmament and non-proliferation treaties. The EU and Brazil concur that the best way to deal with global issues is through effective multilateralism, placing the UN system at its centre. Both sides welcome the establishment of an EU-Brazil political dialogue, initiated under the German Presidency of the EU.’<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Free translation from the original Portuguese text.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> The German Presidency, to which the parties make reference, is the period from January till June 2007. The *Country Strategy Paper* and the *Communication* were released and the summit was organized during this time.

Firstly, in reading this quote, the emphasis on the idea that the relationship would be one in which the strategic partners would cooperate and take joint decisions jumps out. ‘Both sides agree’, they ‘agree’, and they also ‘concur’. This shows a strong commitment to a relationship between equals. Secondly, therein some goals very particular to the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’ were presented: fight against poverty and exclusion, biodiversity, disarmament. Thirdly, the references to tackling global challenges, to ‘multilateralism’ and to the centrality of the UN system show that at the core of the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’ there was a commitment to jointly defend and promote a set of rules of the game on a systemic level.

However, as the *Country Strategy Paper* and the *Communication* suggested, the ‘strategic partnership’ would not only be related to systemic goals, but also to regional goals and to a strong economic agenda. It is in this context that article 4 read that ‘the EU and Brazil attach high importance to strengthening EU-Mercosur relations and are committed to concluding the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement’, that article 5 affirmed that ‘[t]he EU and Brazil stress their commitment to strengthen the bi-regional EU-LAC process’, and article 12 argued that the parties ‘reaffirm their strong commitment to conclude promptly the WTO Doha Development Round’ and stressed the ‘commitment to reach an ambitious, comprehensive and balanced agreement that fulfills the development objectives of the Round and significantly fosters trade flows in agriculture, industrial goods and services among and between developed and developing countries.’ In any case, these shared goals were not limited in scope and were connected to concepts like ‘regional integration’ and ‘trade liberalization’. Brazil and the EU did not only want to develop their relationship on a bilateral or regional basis but wanted also to establish a relationship with a systemic scope. This shows that the notion of ‘strategic partnership’ that the parties were promoting at this moment strongly emphasized how Brazil and the EU could cooperate in issues that had a global impact, e.g. environmental cooperation. In an address given in the context of the summit by the Portuguese Prime Minister and President of the European Council José Socrates claimed that ‘one of the areas to which we pay the utmost attention and which has the greatest potential in developing the strategic partnership between Europe and Brazil is without doubt the world’s response to climate change, and not only to climate change but also to the use of biofuels as an essential tool for reducing CO2 emissions and as an alternative to fossil fuels.’<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Address given by José Socrates at the press conference of the EU-Brazil Summit, Lisbon, 4 July 2007.



Looking at the declarations of European and Brazilian leaders after the summit, there are interesting elements in regards to how both sides understood the ‘strategic partnership’ relationship being framed at this time. Mr. Socrates for example, explained the step by positioning Brazil as a Latin American leaders and the connection between Latin America and Europe: ‘[w]e must acknowledge the role Brazil now plays in the world as a global political actor. It has always been clear to us in Portugal that cooperation between Europe and Latin America needed a cornerstone, and that cornerstone has to be Brazil.’ The President of the European Council also expressed clearly his certainty that Brazil and the EU shared a ‘common vision’.

On the Brazilian side, President Lula stressed in his speech at the first Brazil-EU Business Summit the fact that the ‘strategic partnership’ was ‘based on a solid economic reality.’ On the European side, the Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, also emphasized after the political summit the economic relevance of Brazil but also highlighted Brazil’s role as an emerging leadership:

‘I am convinced that close cooperation between the EU and Brazil is extremely relevant today. Looking at today, we see a major trading nation and emerging global political power. Economic stabilisation conducted under the leadership of President Lula has spurred economic growth, and put Brazil on the right track to be South America’s powerhouse. Brazil represents close to 80% of Mercosur GDP and has the means to impulse its integration. Brazil is a pillar of South America’s stability. It has emerged as a champion of the developing world in the UN.’

In this context, the European commissioner revealed that she ignored the opinion of some Member States not much in favor of the new status attributed to Brazil. In a sign of confidence she argued that:

‘I have come here on this special occasion of the first EU Brazil Summit with a strong message: “The EU is deeply committed to developing a strategic partnership with Brazil. There is a huge potential to unlock in this relationship at the multilateral, regional and bilateral level. I also believe that by activating dialogue we will support the conclusion of an EU-Mercosur Agreement”.’

This and the other quotes presented above show thus the effort made by the European Commission to demonstrate its determination about the potential to be developed by means of the bilateral relations with Brazil. It was important for the Commission that although the new ‘strategic partnership’ was associated with the figure of Mr. Barroso and with the bilateral relationship between Brazil and particular EU Member States, like Germany and Portugal, it was interesting for the whole Union to take special care of relations with Brazil.

Interestingly, Ms. Ferrero-Waldner’s speech was titled *Working towards a strategic partnership*. This shows that although the ‘strategic partnership’ had been established that day, it addressed the partnership as though it were still in the making. At some point in her speech this element was later stressed when she argued that: ‘I am hopeful that our already strong

relationship can be taken to a yet higher level, a partnership in which both sides add strength to each other. Let us jointly ensure that we can realise its full potential.’ Therein Ms. Ferrero-Waldner again talked about a possibility that could turn into reality through joint collaboration. This is an important element in the context of the present analysis because it allows one to discuss the nature of the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership.’ Although the European representatives presented Brazil as stronger country and highlighted the potential benefits of cooperation in particular areas and on particular issues, they continually talked about a relationship that they would like to develop and construct. Thus when the first EU summit took place, the ‘strategic partnership’ was treated as a work-in-progress. On the one hand the parties simply established the ‘strategic partnership’ meaning that the relationship suddenly was framed as such and thus presented the ‘qualities’ of such a category of cooperation. On the other hand, the European Commissioner used ‘strategic partnership’ in a way that portrayed it as something that the EU and Brazil might become, that they possibly could achieve. In this context, it becomes clear how difficult it is to treat a ‘strategic partnership’ as a ‘standard’ form of association between international political actors. The problem is not only the difficulty in establishing standard criteria for this ideal type of relationship, but also in making generalizations about how actors enunciate, conceptualize and employ this term as well as use it to establish a framework for a particular bilateral relationship. Yet they do not make it clear when a ‘strategic partnership’ is completely constituted, when a relationship framed as such loses this status and also without specifying how to evaluate if a ‘strategic partnership’ has achieved its goals and if it is successful or not. This is one reason why it makes much more sense from an analytical point of view to focus on the uses and functions associated with the discursive utilization of ‘strategic partnership’ and how it shapes the particular relationship in question. In future summits the idea that the ‘strategic partnership’ is an on-going process was stressed.

In any case, at the start the use of ‘strategic partnership’ by the EU and Brazil as the framework of their bilateral relationship was linked to the historical bonds between Brazil and Europe. Representatives from both sides made reference to the idea of ‘friendship’, to their ‘common vision’ and to some shared values like ‘democracy’ and ‘multilateralism’. On the EU side there was a strong concern about improving economic exchange with Brazil and with South America. Thus there was an emphasis on the necessity to use the relationship with Brazil as a bridge not only to this country, but to the region as a whole. Furthermore, Brazil was raised by the EU to a position of relative equality thanks to its potential role in the facilitation of a final

agreement at the Doha Round, within EU-Mercosur negotiations and in the promotion and consolidation of a multilateral international system.

On the other hand, Brazil also had an agenda of its own when it met the EU in their first bilateral summit. And although there was a shared interest in achieving the above-mentioned common goals, the establishment of the ‘strategic partnership’ with the EU was seen with a special interest by the Brazilian government. At the press conference after the summit, President Lula argued that:

‘(...) we are today partners in the comprehension that changes are necessary, that a deep reform in the United Nations is necessary, and that the UN Security Council must be changed, that other continents will have to be there represented so that the UN becomes definitively a highly democratic and representative multilateral institution of the world in which we live today, which is much different from the world in which we lived in the 1940s, when it was created. Likewise, we are convinced that the environmental question is a set of rights and duties that we all share.’<sup>87</sup>

The ‘strategic partnership’ with the EU was a great achievement for Brazilian foreign policy. It should be acknowledged that it was President Lula’s intent to project the image of Brazil as a recognized global actor. For quite some time Brazil had been struggling to be taken seriously as a leader in South and Latin America. However, before the 2000s, Brazil did not have the resources and projection capabilities to sustain the claim of regional leadership – at least not in a way that could be easily dismissed by some neighbours on political grounds. In that context, one of the country’s foreign policy priority goals, to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, was far from becoming reality. President Lula turned presidential foreign policy into one of the main features of his government and struggled to make Brazil visible as an emerging economy ready to take more responsibility in global matters, to develop cooperation with other major economies and to assume the position of an interlocutor between the developed and the developing world. In that context, he prioritised South-South cooperation, sent troops to Haiti, and struggled to make Brazil heard in global economic governance forums. This posture, associated with the indicators showing sustained growth and success in poverty reduction, turned Brazil into a country that could not be ignored anymore. Even if some neighbours still did not want to recognize Brazil as a leader, the country was reaching a status that it had never had before and after being announced as one of the EU’s strategic partner his position as a global actor could not be put into question anymore. Hence, just like it could be observed in the EU-Russia relationship, the EU-Brazil strategic partnership became an important label. Brazil had been elevated to the ‘big league’, and for the Brazilian government it was the validation of a long pursued status that would allow the country to raise the rhetoric on the permanent seat issue.

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<sup>87</sup> Free translation from the original Portuguese text.

At the first EU-Brazil summit, ‘strategic partnership’ was a label, a constitutive speech act, and a normative instrument. It was a label that suggested the idea of Brazil as a regional leadership and a global actor, while consolidating the position of the EU as one of Brazil’s top partners. It framed a relationship based on shared values, common views, a wide agenda composed of economic, developmental and environmental goals. It also constituted a relationship among equals in which both Brazil had much to offer to the EU, whereas the EU had much to offer to Brazil, even if the tone of some quotes, like those that made reference to the necessity of a consolidation of democracy and of a market economy in Brazil, showed the directive character of the EU’s foreign policy toward the new strategic partner. Finally, ‘strategic partnership’ also acquired a normative dimension associated with the consolidation of a multilateral world. Brazil was portrayed by the EU not only as a strategic partner because it became a global actor and a regional leadership and, as such, a country whose regional presence contributed to the establishment of new poles in the world, but because it was a country that incorporated the notion of multilateralism not only in its foreign policy discourse but also in its actions.

#### ***6.1.4 Following Summits and New Developments in the ‘Strategic Partnership’: Brazil and the EU become Agents of a Fairer World***

After the establishment of the ‘strategic partnership’, EU-Brazil relations kept to their expected pace. The priority of the parties was to jointly develop the *Joint Action Plan* with the guidelines for their cooperation as strategic partners. Some new developments took place before the summit in December 2008 though. On 16 April 2008 Brazil and the EU agreed on a *Memorandum of Understanding* according to which a ‘new structured dialogue on social policies’ was initiated. Later, on 6 June 2008 the first ministerial meeting between Brazil and the EU Troika took place in Brdo pri Kranju (Slovenia). Before the meeting (on 5 June 2008), Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner once more said some words about the ‘strategic partnership’ and the priorities on the agenda:

‘[o]ur Strategic Partnership has a huge potential to bring benefits to our citizens and make a difference on important challenges such as poverty, the current food crisis, environment and sustainable energy. To be successful in facing these global challenges we need to continue working for an effective UN system. (...) This first Troika meeting is a perfect opportunity to discuss how we can work together to mitigate the effects of the climate change. In this sense, the continuous success of Brazil in combating deforestation is extremely important, and we are keen to pursue our co-operation in this area. I am also looking forward to the exchange on other burning issues in the international debate like the increase in food prices and biofuels.’

Whereas the UE-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’ was strongly anchored in economic cooperation, it counted with a broad agenda. Nevertheless, it is worth calling attention to the fact that the more social and environmental topics slowly gained more prominence in the bilateral agenda, as it was observed in the *Joint Action Plan*. Also important to stress in Ms. Ferrero Waldner’s declaration is the continuous positioning of Brazil as an important partner for the resolution of ‘global challenges’.

The second EU-Brazil Summit was scheduled to take place on 22 December 2008, during the French Presidency of the European Council. This is an important fact because as French President Nicolas Sarkozy also assumed the position of president of the European Council and showed a very proactive attitude. One may recall his role during the mediation of the Russo-Georgian Five-Day War. Likewise, President Sarkozy tried to make his trip to Rio de Janeiro as profitable as he could. Followed by his wife – which certainly helped to bring the attention of the local press to the event – the French president arrived in Brazil eager to achieve tangible results both in the context of EU-Brazil relations but also of France-Brazil cooperation.

The summit’s joint statement did not bring anything new to the relationship in terms of agenda and positioning of one party towards the other. Worth mentioning is the repetition of the references to the bases of the ‘strategic partnership’ and its goals:

‘[r]ecalling that their Strategic Partnership stems from shared values and principles – such as democracy, rule of law, promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms – both Brazil and the EU agreed on the importance of an effective multilateral system, centred on a strong United Nations, as a key factor in the tackling of global challenges. In this context, they recognized the need to pursue the reform of the main UN bodies, among them the General Assembly, ECOSOC, and the Security Council, with a view to enhancing the representativeness, transparency and effectiveness of the system.’

Hence, once again there is an emphasis on the element of ‘shared values and principles’ as a constitutive element of the ‘strategic partnership’ and a focus on the consolidation of ‘multilateralism’ as a systemic norm. The new asset brought by the second summit was actually the disclosure of the *Joint Action Plan*. According to the document, the European Union and Brazil agreed to construct a ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ by ‘[p]romoting peace and comprehensive security through an effective multilateral system’; ‘[e]nhancing the Economic, Social and Environmental Partnership to promote sustainable development’; ‘[p]romoting regional cooperation’; ‘[p]romoting science, technology and innovation’; and ‘[p]romoting people-to-people exchanges’. President Lula highlighted the great ‘ambition’ of the parties that could be observed in the document. But actually the *Joint Action Plan* pointed out the areas highlighted in previous bilateral documents. There is not much difference between the ‘strategic partnership’ and the ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ besides an interest in emphasizing the broad scope of the bilateral relationship. Moreover, the parties used the opportunity to

reiterate again their commitment to multilateralism: '[a]s global actors in a multipolar world, the EU and Brazil concur that the best way to deal with global issues is through a strengthened multilateral system placing the United Nations at its centre'. The real novelty of the document was limited to the establishment of the bilateral procedures between the 'strategic partners':

'[t]he relations between the EU and Brazil will be enhanced on the basis of annual dialogues at the highest level and regular Summits and Ministerial meetings. Such meetings will notably address global challenges and crises that threaten the stability and sustainable development of societies and economies around the world. Senior Official meetings and the European Community-Brazil Joint Committee meetings will contribute to the preparation of the Summit and Ministerial meetings as well as to the monitoring of progress on the ongoing dialogues and the implementation of the Joint Action Plan. This Joint Action Plan has a life span of three years and is due to be revised ahead of the EU-Brazil Summit in 2011. Progress will be reported to the Summits.'

The *Joint Action Plan* only addressed in more detail how the parties intended to improve and develop their cooperation in the five areas mentioned above, which structured their 'comprehensive strategic partnership'. However, attention should be called to the fact that most statements on how to approach the issues on the agenda argue that the parties should 'promote', 'facilitate', 'deepen cooperation', 'work towards', and 'encourage'. The 'strategic partnership' was certainly comprehensive in terms of the amount of issues that were integrated into the bilateral agenda. However, throughout the document it was evident that the parties were extremely cautious and very general in their joint approach. The *Joint Action Plan* did not really show how the parties would address sensitive issues and was not specific on how to deal with challenges. In spite of this vagueness in the language used, the idea that the representatives of the parties tried to portray was at all means that the 'strategic partnership' had been developing as planned, that the relationship was in its terms successful. Both in the *Joint Action Plan* and in the documents and declarations released before it, the parties were making an effort to stress the relevance of their shared values and of the potential of their cooperation, but they seemed to have failed to show how that could be actually done. In any case, even if it was not completely clear how the joint goals would be achieved, there were supposedly no reasons to complain. In his press statement after the summit, President Lula tried to prove with numbers the success of the 'strategic partnership':

'[s]ince we launched the Partnership, at the Lisbon Summit in 2007, our expectations regarding the potential of this alliance were fulfilled. This year, our commercial exchange grew 26% and exceeded US\$77 billion, representing 22% Brazil global trade. The direct investments of EU-member states in 2007 equaled to US\$18 billion. That represents 54% of what we received that year. We have ample space for growth and diversification.'<sup>88</sup>

Unfortunately, it was not clear if these economic results were achieved thanks to any reformulation or new bilateral measures aimed at stimulating trade and investment. The

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<sup>88</sup> Free translation from the original Portuguese text.

importance of this dimension on the agenda is undeniable, but besides the business summits that followed the political summits, there were no major visible incentives given to the intensification of economic relations between the parties. The numbers followed a participation of the EU in the Brazilian economy that could already be observed before the 'strategic partnership' had been announced. Interestingly, in the business summit that followed the second EU-Brazil Summit, the Brazilian President thanked the 'European and Brazilian entrepreneurs, who believed in the investment and trade opportunities reinforced by the Brazil-European Union strategic partnership.' I call attention to the word 'reinforced' used by Mr. Lula da Silva, which shows that at his moment that 'strategic partnership' was an idea, a framework, which stressed the relevance of EU-Brazil relations and through this process of labeling was trying to strengthen the bilateral links of cooperation but without being anchored in new joint agreements that could facilitate this end.

That is not *per se* a negative characteristic of the 'strategic partnership' but instead I am calling attention to the state of affairs at the time. Relations were certainly different from what they had been before. The organization of annual summits and the issuing of a joint action plan were part of a new reality, but the 'strategic partnership' was mainly a label, a way to stress values and norms, than an instrument taking effective measures to develop new joint projects.

Some more tangible results could be observed by focusing the analysis on particular Brazilian interests. Despite the attention given by President Lula to economic cooperation, and to the belief that the 'strategic partnership' between Brazil and the EU was 'based on the conviction that global solidarity is the foundation of a truth culture of justice and peace', Brazil achieved an important victory at the second EU-Brazil summit. This was clear when Mr. Sarkozy declared at the joint press conference that followed the summit that 'I think we need Brazil as a permanent member of the Security Council.' The president's statement was important for two reasons. Firstly, because it showed that the 'strategic partnership' between Brazil and the EU was paying off, at least for Brazil. Secondly, it showed that, despite being a relationship between two international political actors, the EU-Brazil 'strategic partnership' was a set of multiple games. When the President of the European Council and French President backed Brazil's claim for a permanent seat at the Security Council, Brazil was negotiating a set of agreements on transfer of military technology with France. Actually the visit of Mr. Sarkozy permitted the launch of two joint action plans. Besides the one between Brazil and the EU, Presidents Lula and Sarkozy also announced a joint action plan between Brazil and France. It was a joint action plan designed to address the new developments within the Brazil-France 'strategic partnership'. It addressed bilateral political dialogue, economic cooperation and even

cultural cooperation as 2009 was announced as the year of France in Brazil. However, the priority of Franco-Brazilian cooperation at this time was co-operation in defense. The parties discussed the joint cooperation in the development by Brazil of conventional submarines and a first nuclear submarine and the purchase of French Cougar helicopters and Dassault Rafale combat jet planes. At this time bilateral cooperation between France and Brazil had a positive influence (for Brazil) in the developments for the EU-Brazil 'strategic partnership'. Brazil obtained support not only from the French president, but also from an EU representative, support that it long sought in setting its sights on a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. This example, like the one involving Portugal, shows that the 'strategic partnerships' between Brazil and EU member-states like Spain, Germany, France and Portugal, had, and still have an important function in the dynamics of the Brazil-EU 'strategic partnership'. Brazil was cooperating with EU Member States and there were also direct joint-cooperation between Brazil and the EU. The *EU Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013* stated that cooperation projects had not been taking place only through development cooperation but also through 'various thematic budget lines' and through 'horizontal and regional cooperation programmes'. The document said that bilateral cooperation was in 2005 close to 65 million Euros but through additional sectorial projects Brazil was receiving close to 350 million Euros from the EC and member-states for the pilot program for the protection of the Brazilian rain forest, besides other amounts related to other projects in social development and economic cooperation.

Nevertheless, in spite of the documents and speeches, of the summits, political dialogue and cooperation in multiple areas with emphasis on the economic relations and on environmental issues, of the cordial relations between Brazil and particular Member States, a feeling remained that cooperation had still not reached its full potential or at least that the elevation of the relationship to the category of 'strategic partnership' did not bring more tangible results than those that were already visible when the relationship was not framed in these terms.

On the other hand, the 'strategic partnership' indeed strengthened the idea of 'friendship' between Brazil and the EU. During the press conference after the second bilateral summit, President Lula stated that he had the 'great joy of welcoming the President of the European Commission, my friend, and a friend of Brazil, José Manuel Durao Barroso'.<sup>89</sup> One should not ignore the rhetorical skills of President Lula, but as it has been said previously, one should also take into consideration the importance of the figure of Mr. Barroso for the

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<sup>89</sup> Free translation from the original Portuguese text.



establishment of the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’. In this case the Brazilian President was obviously grateful to Mr. Barroso for the importance attributed by him to Brazil, making the country be included in the list of the EU’s key partners. But the idea of ‘friendship’ cannot be taken as empty rhetoric in this case. Differently to the context of EU-Russia relations, the tone of the statements praised an idea of complicity. In a context in which there were no real critical tense interactions between Brazil and the EU and cooperation kept following its desired pace, such declaration made the utilization of ‘strategic partnership’ something much more acceptable or less questionable than in the EU-Russia case. All of this was dependent of course on the context and linguistic environment in which the relationship in case was developed. Even if Brazil is and was a country with ambitions in the international realm, Lula’s global actor rhetoric sounded much less aggressive to a European public than Russia’s. In the Brazilian case, the past relationship and present initiatives validated the notion of ‘friendship’ and the use of ‘strategic partnership’ reinforced the mutual acknowledgement that a friendly relationship was indeed the case. Likewise the recognition that the ‘strategic partnership’ was achieving its goals contributed to a strengthening of friendly links between the partners.

#### ***6.1.5 Brazil and the EU building their Future Together and preparing a Fairer World***

In 2009 the impression on both sides was that the ‘strategic partnership’ between Brazil and the EU was successful, and it seemed that they would insist in a discourse that exalted the positive bilateral and systemic outcomes of bilateral cooperation. The *Joint Communiqué* of the 11th EC-Brazil Joint Committee was very clear in stating on 7 July 2009 that relations were ‘excellent’ after the two first summits:

‘Brazil and the EC hailed the excellent state of the bilateral relationship and its significant consolidation and diversification following the launch of the EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership at the 1st EU-Brazil Summit in Lisbon in July 2007 and the adoption of the related Joint Action Plan at the 2nd Summit in Rio de Janeiro in December 2008. (...) They underlined their shared values, such as the respect of democratic principles and human rights and reiterated their commitment to strengthening multilateralism in defence of international peace and security and the promotion of development and social justice.’

The *Joint Communiqué* also stated the parties’ intent on holding joint committee meetings on an annual basis ‘to reflect the strengthening of the relationship’. In this optimistic context the Delegation of the European Commission to Brazil<sup>90</sup> released in September 2009 a leaflet entitled *Building our Future Together* in which it presented basic information on the ‘strategic partnership’ to the greater public. The title itself already made reference to the

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<sup>90</sup> The diplomatic representation of the European Commission in Brazil, which after *Lisbon Treaty* became effective was renamed the Delegation of the European Union to Brazil.

necessity to cooperate. But the advertising material had other interesting uses of language. If one opened the flyer one would find on the top the heading '[t]he EU and Brazil: preparing a fairer world' and then would read about the 'shared key values' of 'respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law' and about the partnership at global level in 'promoting regional stability and prosperity, fighting poverty, protecting the environment and reforming world governance'. What is striking is how the Commission represented Brazil and the EU as actors joining its forces to make the world a 'fairer' place. This is interesting because the relationships between the EU and its strategic partners normally focus on a particular thematic rhetoric. In the Russian case it could be seen that the EU is much concerned *inter alia* about market liberalization, energy, human rights, and regional security. The next chapters show that in the case of China and India a particular set of goals are stressed that define the core and nature of the 'strategic partnership'. In the Brazilian case it is really interesting how the parties insist on the idea that they can help to construct a 'fairer world'. Another sub-heading in the leaflet read '[f]acing global challenges together' what also stressed the idea of a relationship with global repercussions. In this section, the belief in 'an effective multilateral system', and on the role of the UN, were again presented as 'essential if we are to tackle the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'. In another section with the sub-heading '[t]he basis of a Strategic Partnership', the material argued that the 'partnership (...) explicitly commits the EU and Brazil to a number of goals (...) *inter alia* 'promote peace & human security'; 'increase economic ties, trade & investment'; 'encourage the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals'; 'cooperate in science and technology'. In the final section entitled '[m]anaging the EU-Brazil relationship' the Delegation of the European Commission stressed the establishment of regular dialogue in fifteen 'areas of mutual interest'. This leaflet was thus relevant for the present thesis because it summed up in just one page for the larger public the terms of the 'strategic partnership'. It showed how the EU saw the cooperation with Brazil, not only regarding its bases and goals but also regarding its ambition to turn this relationship into a bilateral cooperation capable of making the world 'fairer'. That says much about how the EU wanted to portray Brazil, but also how it perceived this country as a partner. The fact that it saw Brazil as a country with potential for development in so many areas and in line with the EU's most cherished values shows that the EU wanted to demonstrate its trust in Brazil and in their cooperation.

### 6.1.6 The Third EU-Brazil Summit

The Third EU-Brazil Summit took place on 6 October 2009. The speeches of the representatives at the conference focused mainly on the Doha Round of the World Trade Organization and on climate change, reflecting the efforts made by President Lula to resume WTO negotiations after the standstill initiated in 2008 and the preparations for the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 15) to take place in Copenhagen in December 2009. There were no surprises to the bilateral agenda at the Third Summit.<sup>91</sup> As usual, the parties stressed in their joint statement their common values and principles and the necessity of a ‘strong United Nations’. However, one important element brought by the parties was the return to the agenda of the emphasis on the UN Reform. The third summit *Joint Statement* said Brazil and the EU ‘recognized the need to pursue the reform of the main UN bodies, among them the General Assembly, ECOSOC, and Security Council, with a view to enhancing the representativeness, transparency and effectiveness of the system’. In the context of the previous years, the statement was not surprising. Since the parties constantly stressed the necessity to consolidate a multilateral international system with the UN at the center, it was more than comprehensible that the UN would be submitted to the necessary reforms to adequate it to its function as main global governance institution. Nevertheless, one should not forget that in the previous summit the president of the European Council had stated that Brazil should become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and it is after this statement that the topic of UN Reform obtained a special role in the agenda of the ‘strategic partnership’. That shows that Mr. Sarkozy’s declaration was not empty rhetoric. At the time his declaration was proclaimed it had the effect of making the claim for a more representative UN and Security Council – and consequently of attributing to Brazil the status of a future Security Council member – a priority in the agenda, even if Mr. Sarkozy was not President of the European Council anymore.

In this context, even if some disagreements persisted on some topics, the general feeling was that the ‘strategic partnership’ was being profitable both to Brazil and to the EU. Nobody could complain about trade and investment despite the global financial crisis, the Brazilian government was glad with the status of ‘strategic partner’, ‘global actor’ and ‘regional leadership’, and the EU was glad to have a partner in the implementation of its structural foreign policy. The joint statement outlined that: ‘[s]ummit leaders expressed their great satisfaction with the successful development of the EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership. They also committed

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<sup>91</sup> A new initiative was the creation of a Joint Programme on Culture 2011-2014 that ‘focused on cultural diversity, the development of the cultural and creative economy and its industries and cultural heritage’ (according to the description found in the second *Joint Action Plan* released in 2011).

to exploring the possibility of setting up new sectoral dialogues on issues of common interest. They reiterated their commitment to foster the Partnership aiming at the generation of concrete benefits for the peoples of Brazil and the EU and of third countries.’

### ***6.1.7 Brazil becomes More than a Strategic Partner***

In July 2010, after a consultation to the European Parliament, the European Commission adopted the *Brazil Country Strategy Paper/National Indicative Programme 2007-2013 Mid Term Review and National Indicative Programme 2011-2013*.<sup>92</sup> As the title makes clear, this document was a review of the initiatives of cooperation that followed the *Country Strategy Paper* launched in 2007 and presented guidelines for bilateral cooperation in the period 2011-2013. The long document presented a thorough assessment of cooperation along the two ‘main focal areas’ of ‘enhancing bilateral relations’ and ‘promoting the environmental dimension of sustainable development’. The general conclusion presented was that the goals had been achieved successfully although some improvements were necessary in cooperation regarding the second focal point. According to the assessment of the European Commission, no major alterations should be made to the strategy that had been implemented:

‘[o]verall, neither the financial crisis effects, nor the present status of the political, economic, social and environmental situation, require any changes in the CSP’s priorities and response strategy. On the contrary, the launching of the Strategic Partnership in July 2007, complemented by the adoption of a Joint Action Plan in December 2008, together with the approval of a comprehensive range of environmental legislation to control deforestation and promote the sustainable development of the Amazonia, both contributed to strengthening the relevance of the proposed strategy and the selected priority areas. As a consequence, the Brazilian Government, civil society and the Member States generally consider that the original response strategy, as defined in the CSP, remains valid and appropriate to the current situation of the country.’

The document furthermore stressed the ability of the bilateral sectoral agreements to fulfill the expectations of the European Commission. In this context, the revised *Country Strategy Paper* pointed out some of the major results achieved through the sectoral dialogues: ‘High Level Dialogues on Macroeconomic and Finance and Financial Regulatory issues’; ‘Dialogues in the fields of Education and Culture’; ‘Regular Dialogue on Human Rights’; ‘Operation agreement in the field of research on fusion energy’; and ‘Commitment to the implementation of triangular cooperation projects between the EU, Brazil and developing countries in the sectors of health, energy, agriculture and education as well as EU-Brazil-Africa cooperation on sustainable biofuels and bio-electricity’. By looking at these partial results and thinking of possible pre-conceptions about what a ‘strategic partnership’ is, it is striking that

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<sup>92</sup> The elaboration of the document began in December 2008, and after a period of consultations and revisions, it was sent to the European Parliament.

the results presented were the very own implementation of the sectoral dialogues. But if one takes into consideration the terms agreed upon by Brazil and the European Union for their ‘strategic partnership’, this fact is not that surprising. The ‘strategic partnership’ between Brazil and the EU did not involve *high politics* cooperation. Security issues and defense cooperation were not in the agenda. The parties were successful in implementing what they had envisaged and if one thinks thoroughly about what the bilateral cooperation between Brazil and the EU involved before the ‘strategic partnership’, the establishment of this set of dialogues and consultations was a serious improvement and an important step to be taken to improve the ‘focal points’ that constituted the core of their relationship. It is in this context, that the ‘strategic partnership’ could not be criticized by its results. Maybe the goals and the agenda setting could be criticized by not showing the characteristics of a ‘real strategic partnership’ – if one really believes there is such a thing – but the parties were united in arguing that this was not the case and they would keep stressing the accomplishment of their ‘strategic partnership’.

#### ***6.1.8 The Fourth EU-Brazil Summit***

On 14 July 2010 Brazilian and EU representatives met in Brasilia for the fourth EU-Brazil summit. The organization of summits four years in a row showed that Brazil had achieved priority status for EU foreign policy. The expansion of the number of sectoral dialogues to eighteen areas showed that the agenda was being expanded and that the ‘strategic partnership’ was evolving. Through the summit’s joint statement Brazil and the EU representatives highlighted the ‘intensification of EU-Brazil relations’, ‘their satisfaction with the positive implementation of the Brazil-EU Joint Action Plan (...) as well as with the results of the bilateral High Level Political Dialogue’.

Worth pointing out in the language used in the document are the constructions that showed the terms of the bilateral relationship. In the document one could read that ‘Brazil and the EU exchanged views, [b]oth sides recognized’, ‘Brazil and the EU will continue to work together’, ‘Brazil and the EU reaffirmed their commitment to’, ‘agreed to’, ‘reiterated their disposition to continue to work for’. Even though these expressions are the clear use of standard diplomatic talk, their use is not meaningless. They are indeed common diplomatic ‘phraseology’ but they demonstrate firstly that there is some sort of cooperative interaction between the parties and secondly that the parties are making an effort to use expressions that present their relationship in terms of a positive collaboration and of complicity. Through this choice of expressions to present the development of their bilateral relationship, Brazilian and

EU leaders were certainly emphasizing not only their will to cooperate but also their capacity to do so. It also shows how the parties wanted to portray a particular understanding of ‘strategic partnership’: a relationship in which the parties not only have a common history and share values and goals, but also in which they can turn these pre-conditions into real achievements. It is worth calling attention to this notion of ‘validation’. The ‘strategic partnership’ must deliver something. But again here is the problem of what counts as a ‘real achievement’ and how the history and terms of the ‘strategic partnership’ work in favor or against the validation of a particular relationship as successful or not, as a ‘real strategic partnership’ or simple political rhetoric.

In the context of this discussion it is important to highlight the remarks made by the European Council president. In his remarks, Mr. Van Rompuy focused much more on European efforts to overcome the global financial crisis than on the relationship with Brazil. But interestingly, his single assessment of Brazil was that the country was ‘a real strategic partner for the European Union’. One should recall that this is a statement that Mr. Van Rompuy often used to refer to Russia. In the last chapter I argued that when Mr. Van Rompuy said that Russia was a ‘real strategic partner’ he was not only making an assertive speech act, he was also opposing a strong discourse on incompatibilities and lack of capacity to cooperate that permeates the EU-Russia linguistic environment. Does this statement have the same function in the context of EU-Brazil relations? Does it mean that the European Council president is saying that Brazil is a ‘real strategic partner’, whereas others are not? This is hard to say but it does not seem like this is the message that Mr. Van Rompuy wanted to transmit. From the context of the summit and other statements disclosed in the meetings, it seems that he was just stressing the good achievements that had been observed in Brazil-EU relations and validating the legitimacy of calling Brazil a strategic partner. This example is interesting because it shows how a single sentence can have different functions in various linguistic contexts. It is essential to point out these specificities in an analysis. Otherwise everything could be seen as simple as standard diplomatic talk or empty political rhetoric.

It is also important to stress the importance of context, but also the question of who does the talking. Differently from Mr. Van Rompuy, the president of the European Commission dedicated a much larger part of its speech to assess the relationship between Brazil and the EU. Mr. Barroso stressed the ‘vitality of our relationship’ and the idea that Brazil and the EU were ‘natural partners, sharing common values and strategic objectives, whether on economic and financial affairs, climate change or the liberalisation of world trade.’ He also argued that the implementation of the *Joint Action Plan* had been characterized by ‘excellent progress’,

highlighted the fact that regular talks had been held in ‘around 18 areas’ and mentioned ‘in particular our dialogues on energy, on macroeconomic and financial affairs and on the environment and climate change.’ Furthermore, the president of the European Commission used the opportunity to express his optimism about his perception regarding the future of the ‘strategic partnership’:

‘I have no doubt that the existence of the strategic partnership will continue to provide the impetus needed to deepen our relationship, to extend dialogue to new areas and to revitalise existing talks.

In the words of the great Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade: “[w]e must always aspire to something that, once achieved, does not leave us bereft of ambition”. Relations between the European Union are a perfect example of this: despite the progress that has been made, there is much more still to be achieved.’

It was important what Mr. Barroso said on the occasion about the ‘strategic partnership’ since it defined to some extent what the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’ was. It was not only a thoughtful reference to one of the most important Brazilian poets it was also a great claim about the ‘meaning’ of ‘strategic partnership’. So far I have discussed the establishment of parameters to judge the success of a ‘strategic partnership’. In this context, the statement of Mr. Barroso is extremely relevant because he claims that the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’ is not a relationship that is based on some goals which when achieved will serve as evidence that it was successful and fulfilled its functions. It is a relationship inflow, in which new developments and new successes will be the fundament for new joint projects. This idea of ‘never-ending relationship’ was not something new. It could already be seen in the first summit. But it is interesting how this idea was consolidated as a constitutive element of the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’.

In this sense, it could be argued that through the analysis of the quotations selected so far there are elements in the speeches of Brazilian and EU representatives that are very particular of this specific ‘strategic partnership’. However, looking at the same speech from the president of the European Commission there is another illuminating passage that shows that the rhetoric applied by the EU representatives in the case of Brazil has similarities to those applied to the other strategic partners of the EU:

‘Brazil is a key partner for the EU. The world is changing and part of this new world is a thriving Brazil that is on the rise. The EU is delighted to see a strong Brazil that can help solve global problems, contribute to the stability and prosperity of Latin America and develop our bilateral relations.’

When comparing this excerpt with others by Barroso concerning Russia, it is clear how the discourse of EU’s representatives regarding their strategic partners is similar. It is not only the ‘Brazil is a key partner’ phrase that is unmistakable, but also how the argument is constructed. Firstly, the country is presented as ‘a key partner’ of the EU, then reference is made to the characteristics and challenges of an ever-changing world, and finally there is mention of

how the cooperation between the ‘strategic partner’ and the EU can contribute with solutions, stability, peace, or justice. One should not ignore the basic fact that the speeches of the same EU representatives are being analyzed, but it shows that even if the EU has been having problems in defining what ‘strategic partnership’ means in the context of its foreign policy approach<sup>93</sup> there are some broad references and structures in the construction of the discourse about how to address a ‘strategic partner’ that show some signs of regularity.

By looking at the statements of the Brazilian president at the fourth bilateral summit, they follow much of what was said by the European representatives. In any case, there are two passages of President Lula’s speech at the Fourth EU-Brazil Business Summit (following the political summit) that are worth mentioning. In the first passage, the Brazilian president argued: ‘I think that the first thing that we have to praise is the quality of the strategic partnership between the European Union and Brazil. And before the strategic partnership between the European Union, the relation between Brazil and Europe’.<sup>94</sup> This quote illustrates the effort made by the Brazilian President to show his agreement with the way the relationship had been conducted, as well as its achievements. Again, he framed the relationship between Brazil and the EU as a by-product of the connection between Brazil and Europe not only in its history but also in the other elements that constitute this relationship, like the ‘shared values.’ In accordance with that, President Lula went on to address ‘European businessmen’ and argued: ‘I am extremely satisfied with our strategic partnership. I think we have an extraordinary growth potential. We have lots of affinity, lots lots of affinity.’<sup>95</sup> President Lula’s statements go normally straight to the point. And in this case his statement was again clear. He wanted to stress the similarities and compatibilities between Brazil and Europe. It was certainly not an innocent statement. He is known for his negotiation skills and for being extremely convincing. And in this case he is trying to ‘sell’ the country. He is stressing an image, positioning Brazil as a desirable investment target. But interestingly not only Brazil claimed this idea of affinity. It is something that could also be found in the statements of European representatives. This is in fact another element that should be highlighted after the analysis of the first four EU-Brazil Summits: how the assertions of one side are echoed by the other. It is difficult to find any slight provocation from one party to the other. There was no great challenge to what one heard about itself and about the ‘strategic partnership’. There were no great attempts at repositioning. Both

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<sup>93</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>94</sup> Free translation from the original Portuguese text.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.



the EU and Brazil seemed in consensus about almost everything and that was the idea of ‘strategic partnership’ that they were trying to present.

### ***6.1.9 EU and Brazil expanding the Agenda and consolidating the Strategic Partnership: Moving towards ‘Strategic Global Action’?***

A couple of months after the fourth EU-Brazil Summit (16 September 2010), the European Commission introduced another leaflet titled *Confronting Global Challenges Together*. Like the previous leaflet, it presented basic information about the ‘strategic partnership’. There were two interesting features in this material that should be mentioned. Firstly, it is interesting that it had a section entitled ‘The Strategic Partnership: the results’ in which all the important achievements of the ‘strategic partnership’ in the eyes of the European Commission were listed: ‘the signature of a bilateral agreement on research into nuclear fusion (...); the conclusion of an agreement on commercial civil aviation and an agreement on aviation safety that will facilitate trade in aircraft and aircraft parts; the re-launch of negotiations between the EU and the regional grouping, Mercosur, with the aim of creating a free trade area of more than 700 million people; increased cooperation in science and technology including Brazil’s participation in the EU’s 7th Framework Programme which focuses on developing bio-technology, ICT, energy and the environment; the initialing of a Visa Waiver agreement that will establish full reciprocity between Brazil and the EU; the active participation of Brazil in the EU’s Erasmus Mundus programme, which helps develop links between educational institutions on both sides; the establishment of a Civil Society Round Table between the European Economic and Social Committee and its counterpart, the Economic and Social development Council of Brazil.’

The leaflet thus showed the breadth of the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’ and again tried to validate the idea that the relationship had been successful. The second interesting element in the leaflet was the emphasis on the idea that cooperation between Brazil and the EU was a force for good in the world: ‘Brazil and the EU are working together to promote prosperity, to protect the environment and to reform global governance.’ This idea was already present in the leaflet published in 2008, as well as in other statements, but it is interesting how the European Commission was making a real effort to position not only itself and Brazil as positive forces in the world but also that by doing so it was reinforcing the positioning of Brazil as the ideal partner for the implementation of its structural foreign policy.<sup>96</sup> Brazil was once more portrayed as a country that perfectly matched the EU strategy found in the documents that addressed the goals of its foreign policy and the idea behind its ‘strategic partnerships’.

On March 2011 a new announcement supported the discourse about the success within the ‘strategic partnership’. The Vice President of the European Commission and official in

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<sup>96</sup> See Chapter 4.

charge of transport issues, Mr. Siim Kallas, revealed the establishment of an agreement between the EU and Brazil in air transport. In the words of the EU representative:

‘[w]hat we have reached with Brazil today is an agreement that will open up the air traffic market between the EU and Brazil. This will generate significant economic benefits for businesses, travelers, the aviation industry and the wider EU and Brazilian economies. I am also very pleased with the strong provisions included in the agreement that will make it easier for our carriers to operate in Brazil. This is particularly important in view of the very important world sports events that Brazil will be hosting in the coming years.’

That shows that the sectoral dialogues were paying off to some extent. There was actual evidence to support the assertions from both sides that the parties were achieving their joint goals through the ‘strategic partnership’. In a European Commission memorandum released on 30 September 2011<sup>97</sup> about EU-Brazil relations, a set of recently established agreements<sup>98</sup> and the expansion of the number of areas in which sectoral dialogues were held<sup>99</sup> were highlighted. In this context and in the days previous to the fifth EU-Brazil summit, which would take place on 4 October 2011 in Brussels, the president of the European Commission would present Brazil in very special terms and propose a new step forward in the bilateral relationship. According to the press release *EU-Brazil Summit – consolidating the strategic partnership*, Mr Barroso argued that:

‘[a]fter having consolidated our high-level relationship with Brazil these last five years, we need now to move from strategic partnership to strategic global action. I am looking forward to discuss with President Rousseff how to deepen our bilateral cooperation in areas as diverse as education, culture, industry or transport. But Brazil is more than a strategic partner – is a like-minded country with which we want to work together on issues of global concern such as sustainable development, climate change and our G20 agenda.’

In his speech the head of the European Commission made a very important assertion and act of positioning. Brazil was presented as ‘something’ more than a ‘strategic partner’. A new category of relationship was even created called ‘strategic global action’. Brazil was also

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<sup>97</sup> Memo/11/651, Brussels, 30 September 2011.

<sup>98</sup> The document pointed out ‘[a] Co-operation Agreement between Euratom and Brazil in the field of fusion energy research was signed in November 2009 (not yet into force pending the completion of the ratification procedure by Brazil)’; ‘[a] horizontal and an air safety agreement were signed at the 4th Summit held in Brasilia on 14 July 2010. Negotiations have been concluded on a comprehensive air transport agreement (open-skies agreement) in March 2011 and signature will take place at the 5th EU-Brazil Summit in October 2011’; ‘[a] thematic agreement aiming to increase reciprocal co-operation in the field of Science and Technology was concluded with Brazil in 2005’; ‘2 short-stay visa waiver agreements (for ordinary and diplomatic passport holders) were signed in October 2010. The former entered into force on 1 April 2011 whilst entry into force of the latter remains pending, subject to the approval of the Brazilian Senate’.

<sup>99</sup> At this moment sectoral dialogues were held in the areas of ‘1) Energy, 2) Environment and Climate Change, 3) Information Society, 4) Maritime Transport, 5) Regional Development and Territorial Integration, 6) Satellite Navigation - “Galileo”, 7) Science and Technology, 8) Social Policies and Social Cohesion, 9) Culture, 10) Education, 11) Air Transport, 12) Nuclear issues, 13) Economic and Financial issues; 14) Administrative cooperation on competition issues; 15) Financial services; 16) Statistics; 17) Institutional strengthening and state modernization; 18) Sanitary and Phyto-sanitary Consultation Mechanism; 19) Industrial pilot-regulatory dialogues (textile, steel, non-ferrous minerals); 20) Intellectual International Property Rights.’

portrayed as a 'like-minded' country. That was a strong statement. It went certainly beyond the common references to historical and cultural links and shared values. It was a speech act that reinforced both the idea that the relationship with Brazil had a special meaning for the European Union and to reinforce the idea often enunciated about their cooperation being used as a force for good in the world. Through the proposal of moving the relationship from a 'strategic partnership' to a 'strategic global action', Mr. Barroso was arguing that their relationship was not at the point of recognizing the potential for being a 'force of good' anymore, but that the moment had come to turn this potential into effective action. The same press release quoted also the President Van Rompuy of the European Council, who explained what the EU intended and what it meant with the new developments that would be discussed at the fifth Summit:

'Brazil is an important partner for the European Union and this summit will take our relationship one step further. Our Partnership goes well beyond the bilateral agenda. It's about working together to take leadership and exert responsibility on regional and global issues, and in multilateral fora. I look forward to building common ground with the new Brazilian President to address joint challenges such as climate change and economic governance.'

Mr. Van Rompuy and Mr. Barroso seemed to agree that the EU and Brazil had to join forces and start acting together in global international forums, a move that could only be possible with a like-minded country like Brazil. These statements are important because they support the argument presented in earlier chapters of the present thesis about the whole of shared values in a strategic partnership. It had been argued that the element of shared values does not define the possibility of framing a bilateral relationship as a 'strategic partnership'. It had been said that one has to analyze the relationship and observe to what extent some particular values are presented by the parties as a fundament of their 'strategic partnership', meaning that countries with different degrees of value sharing can certainly define a relationship in which they take part as a 'strategic partnership'. What is interesting in the fragments above is that they argue that Brazil and the EU are compatible, and that their degree of value-sharing is so high that they even transcend the notion of 'strategic partnership'. It seems that a 'strategic partnership' may be framed with different degrees of value-sharing but there is a minimal degree necessary for cooperation to be allowed and also a maximal limit, which makes it possible for the parties to argue that they are more than strategic partners. In this case they would seem to qualify for 'strategic global action'. This shows that the mobilization of shared values and also the notion of 'friendship' have an important function in the understanding of the nature and meaning of 'strategic partnership'. After discussing the EU-Russia relationship and after the analysis that has been conducted so far about the EU-Brazil relations, it can be seen how the element of shared values is essential in the understanding of the EU representatives regarding the fundamentals of the EU 'strategic partnerships'.

### **6.1.10 The Fifth EU-Brazil Summit**

On the eve of the Fifth Summit the European Union Council Secretariat released a factsheet that stated that the previous four bilateral summits ‘have been very successful events generating a positive dynamic in the relationship and providing guidance and impetus for intensified cooperation at technical level.’ In such a positive environment one could think that the fifth summit, in which the second *Joint Action Plan* (2012-2014) would be launched, would bring some major innovations to the agenda. But that was not the case. The document was in fact just a revision of the 2008 version. Most of the parts of the document preserved the same sentences found in the first *Joint Action Plan*. Values and principles were once again reinforced, their ‘common cultural heritage’ was stressed and the shared goals agreed in 2008 to ‘construct a comprehensive strategic partnership’ were kept intact. Despite the declarations about moving beyond the ‘strategic partnership’ towards a ‘strategic global action’, the framework concept remained ‘strategic partnership’.

In this context, it could be observed that the remarks and statements of European and Brazilian leaders focused once again on stressing the success of the bilateral relationship while reinforcing the necessity to implement new strategies to unleash the full potential of Brazil-EU relations. In his remarks after the summit, the President of the European Council was very generous in his evaluation about Brazil: ‘Brazil’s success is quite spectacular. I commend the remarkable stability and solidity that the Brazilian economy has demonstrated over the last few years. Most importantly, Brazil has succeeded in coupling sustained economic growth with more equitable distribution of income. Its future looks bright’. Mr. Van Rompuy also called attention to the improvement of the relationship in comparison to the initial phase when the ‘strategic partnership’ was established:

‘[t]he EU and Brazil have closer and more comprehensive relations than ever before since the establishment of the Strategic Partnership in 2007. In just a few years, we have developed a dialogue and cooperation in 20 areas (...). The presence of seven Brazilian ministers accompanying President Rousseff today and all key players on the EU side demonstrates that there is a very strong interest on both sides to deepen our relations’.

Furthermore, he argued that despite the good results ‘we are able and willing to do more’. Mr. Van Rompuy made reference to the negotiations with Mercosur for an association agreement – which resumed in 2010 – to clarify the terms of the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’: ‘it is not only about trade, but aims at comprehensive relationship’. Despite the absence of many alterations in the text of the *Joint Action Plan*, the President of the European Council showed his confidence in the further development of EU-Brazil relations and argued

that: '[m]y hope is that within three years, we will be able to develop a true political partnership to complement our trade and economic relations.' With this declaration it was not being said that the relationship was being unsuccessful with the exception of cooperation in economic issues. For Van Rompuy the 'true political partnership' would be established when Brazil and the EU started using their 'privileged position to forge alliances', as strategic partners, to:

'take leadership and exert global responsibility. Together, the EU and Brazil can be a leading force in the Human Rights Council. Together, we can drive the world to more climate action in Durban and set the path to green growth at the Rio+20 Summit. Together, we can make a significant contribution to crisis management and peacekeeping'.

The EU representative again stressed that it was necessary for Brazil and the EU to 'move ahead' to start establishing commitments in particular international forums. With such declarations, the intention was seemingly to point out the necessity of more convergence in the positions pursued by the parties on a number of issues. The EU was insinuating that, in the 'spirit' of their 'strategic partnership', the parties would have to find a way to find a common ground to act together instead of defending positions that often put them on different sides at the negotiations table. Van Rompuy was not at all saying that Brazil and only Brazil was responsible for taking the steps for this convergence to successfully take place, but this was certainly a directive act of positioning: the parties should be able to follow this path in their bilateral relationship for their 'strategic partnership' to become deeper.

The same idea could be found in the declarations of the president of the European Commission after the summit. Mr. Barroso said that he judged it was the moment

'to consider moving from a strategic partnership to a strategic 'complicity'. The European Union and Brazil are natural strategic partners. We share common values and objectives that spring from a historical and cultural heritage that enables us to work together to address not only bilateral concerns but also global challenges, whether they be the financial crisis, climate change or sustainable development. (...) We in Europe see Brazil as a powerful force, as a plus for Europe and the world. In a rapidly evolving international environment we see a proactive Brazil as something that can strengthen world efforts to solve global challenges. We believe in a fairer international order. We believe in a multilateral order. And today we saw this great convergence of views in the course of our discussions. (...) It was therefore an extremely positive summit, where we had the type of frank, open and unrestrained discussion on international issues you might expect between friends and partners. (...) It is important to make it known that Brazil and the European Union can achieve great things in the world'.

This statement was important because in it one can observe most of the elements used by the European Union to frame its relationship with Brazil. One can see how the ideas of 'friendship', 'natural partners', 'shared values and goals', 'convergence', 'powerful force' are used to support the idea that Brazil and have a capacity and possibly an obligation to achieve 'strategic complicity', meaning to join their forces to steer the world by promoting solutions to the important issues on the global governance agenda and, in this process, to help consolidate the norm of 'multilateralism'. Brazil was positioned as the ultimate partner. However, one must

point out that this partnership for a better world was not exactly a non-hierarchical relationship. Actually, it is in the declaration from Brazilians representatives that one can better observe the subtleties of a slightly unequal relationship.

In her speech after the Fifth Brazil-EU Summit, the Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff agreed with the European use of the idea of ‘strategic complicity’: ‘[w]e will, without any doubts, develop the strategic relations between Brazil and the European Union and, as said by the President Durao Barroso, our strategic complicity’.<sup>100</sup> In her speech at the EU-Brazil Business summit she also reiterated previous statements about the EU’s status as a ‘priority partner for Brazil’. But the most interesting parts of Mrs. Rousseff’s speeches on 4 October 2011 were the ones in which once again a Brazilian President spoke as if it was still necessary to convince the EU representatives that Brazil was a faithful and close EU partner. After the political summit, the Brazilian President stated that: ‘Brazil – and at this moment I am sure that I express the feelings of developing economies – is ready to take its responsibilities in a cooperative way. We are partners of the European Union. You can count on Brazil’.<sup>101</sup> The declaration was important because it gave a positive feedback to the EU representatives that Brazil was in accordance to what they were proposing in terms of a partnership with global repercussions. Also interesting was the fact that the Brazilian president presented herself as if she were the spokesperson of the developing economies. That can be understood as an interesting act of positioning in which on the other side Brazil was portrayed in a position of leadership but at the same time confirmed its status of developing economy. Finally, another element that can be taken into consideration is the fact that the EU representatives showed that the EU was the party with the power of initiative. It was the EU who was recognizing a new status of Brazil and thus proposing that this new status had an influence in the terms of the bilateral relationship. Brazil was put in a position of confirming the EU’s initiative. In another statement, the Brazilian president said at the business summit that ‘[w]e are a country that has been going through a process of modernization for decades with the support of European companies which invested and generated through our history thousands of jobs in Brazil. Hence, I can say that the many different countries of the European Union contributed for us to be where we are now’.<sup>102</sup> The statement was certainly meant as a compliment to the European businessmen and to the EU representatives at the event. But it also put Brazil in the position of

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<sup>100</sup> Free translation from the original Portuguese text.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

a country, which almost owed its modernization and current growth to Europe and was to some extent in a position of dependence.

The two fragments of President Roussef's speeches show that on the Brazilian side there is the slight notion that Brazil is indebted to Europe, that it is to some extent dependent, or that it is the weaker side of the 'strategic partnership'. It was certainly the role of the Brazilian presidency to go to the summit and do its best to attract potential investments to the country. But what these examples show is that the Brazilian leadership did not have the posturing of a global actor in a relationship among equals. It is interesting because whereas the speeches of the EU representatives stressed how Brazil was a special and unique partner in a battle to solve global problems and construct a fairer and better multilateral world, the Brazilian representatives were very shy in their statements. Brazil did not try to present itself as the global actor that the EU claimed it was.

#### ***6.1.11 The Sixth EU-Brazil Summit***

In 2012 there was no EU-Brazil summit. The next summit would take place in January 2013. In any case, 2012 was not a bad year for the EU-Brazil relationship. The sectoral dialogues continued to take place and expanded. In June 2012 a dialogue on agriculture was initiated through a memorandum of understanding. In that context, despite the difficulties in reaching agreements on sensitive issues like the Doha Round and the negotiation of the association agreement with Mercosur, the perception from both sides was that the relationship was moving ahead according to what had been suggested in the previous summit.

The Sixth EU-Brazil Summit took place in Brasilia on 24 January 2013 and the joint statement produced by the parties demonstrated that Brazil and the EU were making efforts to deepen their cooperation and also to make the relationship acquire a global projection. In the initial part of the statement it is clear how the parties repositioned the emphasis of the relationship to focus on joining forces on global governance issues: '[t]he parties agreed to further strengthen their bilateral political dialogue, in order to promote convergence of views on issues of the global agenda and favoured the rapprochement of positions in international fora'. Therein, the words that stand out are 'convergence' and 'rapprochement'. It should be stressed that this statement makes reference to the negotiations in which Brazil and the EU were on opposing sides. It shows that in their understanding this situation was not compatible with the 'spirit' of their 'strategic partnership', a relationship that was framed in the previous summit as 'strategic complicity', and that as strategic partners they should find a negotiable way to

converge their positions. They recognized that these disagreements were not ideal for their relationship and that they should be able to work on a solution. Despite the use of the word ‘rapprochement’ that does not mean that the parties were really drifting apart from each other but that it was really the time to find solutions for the necessary agreements to be reached.

In this context, it may seem contradictory that the leaders once more were clear in stating that they were satisfied with the relationship. In the text, the parties argued that they ‘emphasized the consistent strengthening of the ties between Brazil and the EU and welcomed the progress of the Strategic Partnership and the advances in the implementation of the Joint Action Plan 2012-2014. They also expressed their satisfaction with the development of the bilateral sectoral dialogues, which involve initiatives in some 30 different areas.’ In fact, one of the major developments in the terms of the ‘strategic partnership’ during the summit was the expansion of the common agenda. Brazilian and EU representatives took the decision to ‘formally establish a high-level dialogue on matters pertaining to international peace and security, including peacekeeping and peace building. Such dialogue will take the form of annual consultations between senior officials.’ It was the first time that security issues became part of the agenda of the ‘strategic partnership’. This is interesting because since the concept ‘strategic partnership’ is often associated with the notion of alliance, it is normally also related to strategic cooperation in security and defense. The EU-Brazil example shows that a ‘strategic partnership’ does not need to approach security issues. These topics can certainly be incorporated onto the agenda, but they do not define ‘strategic partnership’ as a category of association with a particular set of goals.

Also important in the sixth joint statement was the fact that the parties addressed the status of the negotiation process on particular issues in very clear and objective terms. They did not just welcome the bilateral negotiations on these issues. They gave details about what was still missing and pointed out examples of particular achievements, showing that the ‘strategic partnership’ was not only a label, but also a framework through which the parties were meeting, negotiating and trying to find solutions. One example was article 18 of document, assessing developments in the dialogue on bio-fuels:

‘[t]he Leaders welcomed the results of the IV Meeting under the Regular Dialogue on Energy Policy between Brazil and the EU. They highlighted in particular the possibilities of expanding bilateral cooperation in research and development in renewable energy, joint initiatives in energy efficiency, as well as the establishment of an equivalence agreement recognizing the compatibility of Brazilian legislation and European sustainability requirements for biofuels.’

Another example was the evaluation of the negotiations on the EU-Mercosur association agreement, addressed in article 35 of the document:



‘(...) the Leaders examined the course of negotiations since their re-launch in May 2010, in light of the shared commitment to reach an ambitious, comprehensive and balanced result. They welcomed the progress already made in the normative part, agreeing that the continued advancement of the negotiation process requires, at this point, the discussion of preferential access to their respective markets, including the exchange of market access offers. Accordingly, they supported further talks on the negotiations between the EU and Mercosur on January 26, 2013, in the margins of the EU-CELAC Summit, to be held in Santiago of Chile, with the aim of discussing on how to proceed for the next stage of negotiations.’

Thus these two examples show the relationship maturing. The EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’ was not merely a declaration of intentions. The parties were able to provide a common and clear assessment of their negotiations and to specify the following steps to be taken. Furthermore, the document showed that the parties were following the idea of demonstrating the global projection of their relationship and presented joint positions on matters of global concern. For example, article 21 stated a joint position on the Arab-Israeli conflict:

‘[t]he EU and Brazil strongly oppose Israeli plans to expand settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in particular plans to develop the E1 area. They reiterated that settlements are illegal under international law, detrimental to the two state solution, and constitute an obstacle to peace.’

This excerpt shows that Brazil and the EU were in agreement over condemning Israel’s plans to expand settlements in the West Bank and in their agreement on a ‘two state solution’. This demonstrates that Brazil and the EU were able to address jointly issues taken by the international community as a global problem, contributing to the idea that the EU-Brazil cooperation had a potential to have global repercussions.

In the speeches of European and Brazilian representatives after the sixth summit one could find many references to the terms of the ‘strategic partnership’ at this moment. In the remarks of the President of the European Commission, it could be observed once more an effort to highlight the relevance that Brazil had to Europe, how comfortable it was for Europe to develop relations with Brazil and how successful their ‘strategic partnership’ had been:

‘(...) [a]nd it is that Brazil, the Brazil of culture, the Brazil bubbling with creativity, that we admire and with which we want to expand and strengthen our relations. (...) our summit today reflected exactly this willingness to become even closer partners in this relationship which is so important to us Europeans, and also, we believe, to Brazil. (...) That is why I should like to highlight how satisfied I am with the progress made in relations between the European Union and Brazil since our decision in July 2007 to launch the EU Brazil Strategic Partnership. The dynamics of the Strategic Partnership, as well as nourishing contacts in the technical and political spheres, have also built up the mutual trust that today enables us to address all issues in a very constructive, open manner, always seeking to make real progress.’

It is worth mentioning in this quote the appearance of the term ‘mutual trust’. As in the examples from the previous chapter, in many speeches EU representatives mentioned the idea of ‘mutual trust’ in the EU-Russia relationship. They argued that this element had to be improved in that particular ‘strategic partnership’. In this context, it is interesting that Mr. Barroso emphasized that the EU-Brazil relationship could indeed be characterized by mutual

trust. That pointed to the special nature of the relationship that developed between Brazil and the EU. Another relevant part of his speech was when he argued that Brazil and the EU were not only linked by history: '[n]ot just history, but a common destiny.' Therein it is also remarkable how the President of the European Commission made direct and clear statements that positioned Brazil as a *sui generis* and priority partner of the EU. These statements and other declarations that make reference to the 'friendship'<sup>103</sup> between Brazil and the EU show that the EU acknowledged that the relationship with Brazil had a distinguished character.

Nevertheless the relationship is not only based on cultural proximity and values. Mr. Barroso in his speech also pointed out that the attractiveness of Brazil to the EU was directly related to the economic weight of Brazil: 'Brazil's economic and political development in recent years has been extraordinary. With a GDP that is half of that of South America and 70% that of Mercosul, Brazil is becoming one of the great global economic powers. And our mutual commitment to strengthening our relations has grown at the same rate'. Furthermore, Mr. Barroso emphasized that the relationship is ultimately connected to the capacity of the parties to achieve joint goals. In his words: '[p]erhaps the most important aspect of today's meeting, in my view, was that we reaffirmed our commitment to conclude an association agreement between the EU and Mercosur.' In a context, in which most analysts were calling attention to the inability of the parties to make concessions and even of a real interest to reach an agreement on the association agreement, the declarations of the EU representative showed that the economic dimension of the 'strategic partnership' was also essential. For the EU the relationship with Brazil was also a way to achieve economic gains with the country, and indeed with the whole Mercosur region.

Brazilian President Dilma Roussef also reiterated the more pragmatic dimension of the 'strategic partnership'. Without any major reference to 'values', 'friendship' or 'complicity', she stressed the achievements and strengths of the bilateral relationship. Hence, besides highlighting the expansion of the number of sectoral dialogues, the Brazilian president stressed the 'dynamism' of trade and investment relations despite the context of financial international crisis.

The sixth EU-Brazil summit showed a return to the basics. The parties emphasized economic cooperation and joint goals that were on the agenda since 2007 but had not been achieved yet. In addition, as always Brazilian and EU representatives made an effort to provide

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<sup>103</sup> In a speech at a ceremony on 25 January 2013, in which the Brazilian Court of Audits gave Mr. Barroso a decoration, the president of the European Commission talked about the 'liberty, democracy and values on which our friendship is based' (free translation from the original Portuguese text).

the relationship with validation. By showing that some agreements were being reached, that the numbers of trade and investment were positive, that some joint position on internationally relevant issues were possible, and that even the maintenance of some disagreements were not putting the relationship in jeopardy, they could sustain that the relationship had been fulfilling its purpose and was thus being successful.

## **6.2 Challenges to the EU-Brazil ‘Strategic Partnership’**

The analysis of Brazilian and EU documents and speeches has demonstrated that the parties consistently tried to support the assessment that their relationship was successful. There was a constant need for validation. In turn, it has also been argued that the parties acknowledged that the relationship is an ever-developing relationship. New developments, sectoral dialogues and agreements would generate the necessity of new rounds of negotiation. According to this rationale, the constant deepening of bilateral relations and strengthening of global joint action would demonstrate that the relationship was following the right path. Disagreements and opposing opinions should not be taken as evidence of failure but as a stimulus to invest in the relationship and an opportunity to achieve its full potential. However, more convergence on debates of the international agenda was desirable in the spirit of ‘complicity’ that characterized the ‘strategic partnership’. This shows how the perception of success/failure of the parties in this case is completely different when one compares it with the EU-Russia relationship. The different tenets on which each of these relationships were based and the shared idea of ‘friendship’ had an important influence on how the dynamics between the parties was regulated and thus also on how each party interpreted the declarations and actions of its strategic partner.

Despite their proclaimed condition of ‘natural partners’ and ‘friends’, the EU and Brazil are particular political entities with an agenda of their own. In this context, the existence of opposing interests and disagreement should not be seen as signs of a failing ‘strategic partnership’. However, their capacity to sustain the notion of ‘strategic partnership’ and further develop their bilateral cooperation is related to their ability to negotiate, make agreements and overcome some disagreements that could turn into chronic deadlocks and put in jeopardy their possibility to further deepen their cooperation. Thus it is worthwhile to discuss briefly some of the challenges of the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’.

Gratius (2011) argues that Brazil presents itself as the ideal partner for the EU in terms of shared values. One of the main compatibilities between the countries is supposedly their open defence of ‘multilateralism’. However, the author explains that the notions of

multilateralism implemented by the EU and Brazil in their foreign policies are not exactly the same. In Chapter Four, I showed that the EU supports the concept of ‘effective multilateralism’. Gratius (2011b) has argued that ‘effective multilateralism is a path towards global governance and managing multi-polarity’ centred on the United Nations System and on the World Trade Organisation. But she stresses that even inside the EU there are different interpretations about the function of the concept:

‘[f]or functional European multilateralists, it is one tool among many others; while for normative multilateralists it is a superior formula for interaction and for pooling sovereignty at the international level. While smaller EU member states tend to prefer multilateralism, unilateralism and ‘minilateralism’ remain the main foreign policy instruments of larger powers. A clear example of recent unilateralist behaviour within a framework of multilateralism was Germany’s decision to abstain from the UNSC vote on the humanitarian intervention in Libya.’ (Gratius, 2011b, p. 2)

Thus it could be said that even inside the EU, Member States interpret multilateralism differently. But even if one just takes into consideration the EU foreign policy that has been predominant at the moment with its strong ‘engaged’ normative rhetoric, the differences regarding Brazilian multilateralism are much visible. According to Gratius (2011b, pp. 3-4) that explains why Brazil and the EU normally do not share the same positions on most international forums:

‘Brazil’s multilateralism is less value-oriented and more pragmatic, with a clear development focus. Under former president Lula, Brazil moved from a defensive to a status-oriented offensive multilateralism, aimed at soft balancing US power. Its perception of multilateralism is increasingly instrumental to the country’s national interests and its candidacy for a permanent seat at the UNSC.’ (Gratius, 2011b, pp. 3-4)

Thus it must be stressed that although Brazil and the EU do share values and this certainly presents itself as an advantage for their cooperative initiatives, one should not forget that this particular bilateral relationship is just one element of the wider foreign policy strategies of both Brazil and the EU. As it was argued in the introduction to this chapter, Brazil has a historical relationship with Europe that certainly facilitates the possibility for cooperation. But that does not mean that Europe and the EU were and will always be the top priority on the Brazilian foreign policy agenda and that the two strategic partners will not use the norm of multilateralism according to the interests of their foreign policy strategies.

In fact, the EU, despite its importance to Brazilian trade relations, was never the sole priority of Brazilian foreign policy since President da Silva’s rise to power in 2002 (Saraiva, 2014). Gratius (2011) argues that Europe is a second-order priority of the Brazilian foreign policy, used to balance the growing importance of China as an economic partner and global power. The author points out that Europe appeared as the last reference in President Rouseff’s first speech as president and that the current Brazilian minister of Foreign Affairs does not have a European agenda either.

I would not go so far and say that the EU is not a top priority of Brazilian foreign policy. In fact, one has to analyze the Brazilian foreign policy in a historical perspective. In previous decades Brazil presented clear and more limited foreign policy priorities. That has changed with President Lula. In the last decade Brazil tried to act and be perceived as a global actor and as such started implementing a more polycentric foreign policy. Much more attention was given to regional integration in South America, South-South cooperation with African countries and with other emerging markets (Saraiva, 2014). Relations started intensifying with Asian countries, especially with China. This removed the focus away from traditional partners like the US and Europe. But that does not mean that these partners were forgotten or ignored. Brazil's posture towards these countries changed indeed. By having positioned itself as a representative of the developing world and of its own interests, some disagreements became more evident, but that does mean that the EU became a less important partner – witness the effort made by the Brazilian diplomacy to consolidate the 'strategic partnership' with the EU. One should not forget the weight of the EU as a trade and investment partner for Brazil either.

Lazarou (2012) argues that the establishment of the EU-Brazil 'strategic partnership' was a victory for the Brazilian foreign policy and did not create a relationship based on dependency. In fact, it can be argued that the relationship between Brazil and the EU is not a highly asymmetrical relationship as it was in the 1990s. It is also correct that the relationship with China and other emerging markets and the global projection achieved by Brazil in the last years give more leverage to Brazil in its relations with the EU. But it cannot be ignored that the relationship with the EU plays a very important role in the Brazilian foreign policy and also that it has a huge relevance for Brazilian economic relations, even if China's share of Brazil's international trade and investment grows steadily every year. Looking at the speeches of Brazilian representatives in the bilateral political and business summits, it was evident that they wanted to make it clear that the relationship with the EU is fundamental for Brazil. In addition, the fragments observed showed that despite the Brazilian urge to be taken by the international community as a *de facto* global power, Brazilian leaders do not employ a foreign policy discourse as confident and self-assured as the Russian leadership, for example. They are more humble or reluctant in their great power discourse also because they want to construct and preserve the image of a developing country which is growing but which is not a threat. In any case, a slight sense of inferiority can be observed in the Brazilian foreign policy discourse that seems to still have an influence on the hierarchy between Brazil and the EU within their 'strategic partnership'.

In the previous section I demonstrated that the EU-Brazil relationship had achieved some of its goals. It created a regular high-level dialogue-based framework of cooperation that was previously inexistent. It created new channels of communication and cooperation that made EU-Brazil relations transcend the limited scope of a relationship based on trade and investment. It changed the balance of asymmetries inside the bilateral relationship. Nevertheless, one can understand when European representatives claimed for more convergence in their efforts to be major promoters of fairer global governance. When they were doing so, they were not denying that disagreements are possible between strategic partners. But they were saying that if the parties had the joint goal of promoting systemic change, it would be desirable that they would agree on how this should be done.

Gratius (2011), Lazarou (2012) and Saraiva (2014) have pointed out some issues like the opposing postures of the parties on sanctions to Iran in 2010, the lack of support of European countries to Brazilian claims for redistribution of FMI quotes, disputes in the WTO on European environmental standards, the different positions on the deadlock of the Doha Round and on the decision on how to proceed regarding the crisis in Libya in 2011, the lack of progress on the negotiation of the EU-Mercosur association agreement. Regarding these episodes of disagreement, it must be said that Brazil and the EU are different political entities and have each an agenda of their own. But it is not untrue that they share historical links and values to an extent that does not take place between the EU and its other strategic partners. In this context, it is comprehensible that the parties try to claim for an understanding of ‘strategic partnership’ in which more convergence in their foreign policy discourses and action takes place. But one should not forget that their ‘friendship’ links serve as a buffer to the possible harm that disagreements may have for the validation of the bilateral relationship. In this context, these episodes of divergence should not be taken as the trigger for any major crisis in the bilateral relationship.

Lazarou (2012) argues that the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’ is characterized by ‘limited trust and the need to shift the perceptions of both partners’. It is interesting that although ‘trust’ appears often on the discussions between representatives of the EU and Russia, the term does not appear as regularly in the speeches, declarations and remarks of Brazilian and EU representatives. I would not argue that there is a real issue of trust in EU-Brazil relations – at least not one based on holding different basic values. The EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’ has been constructed in a way that, despite a slight asymmetry, the parties independently follow their own foreign policy agendas. In turn, a cooperative initiative was also established in which the parties should act together in the construction of a fairer, less conflictive and multilateralist

world. Hence, the existence of several diverging postures on issues related to global governance becomes a real challenge. But I would say that there is not a real problem of trust but of internal logic of the framework on which the ‘strategic partnership’ is based. If the parties agree on a relationship in which they keep their independence, some individual interests clash and solutions shall be agreed through dialogue, it is only natural that conflicts with higher stakes take some time to be solved. Unless the rules of the relationship and the hierarchy between the partners change, it is always a possibility that some problems remain. In any case, the existence of a more positive common ground and of mutual recognition of the status of ‘friendship’ protect the relationship from the negative impact that disagreements may have for the relationship and raises the probability that the parties may reach common solutions. ‘Complicity’ can be achieved even without full consent.

### **6.3 The EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership: A ‘Special’ Strategic Partnership?**

The goal of this chapter was to address the ‘meaning’ of ‘strategic partnership’ in the context of EU-Brazil relations. In order to discuss the functions of this expression in this particular bilateral relationship, four phases were discussed with a special focus on the language enunciated by representatives of these two international political actors.

I argued that in the 1990s the relations between the EC/EU and Brazil were clearly asymmetrical. Despite its size, Brazil was not perceived as a global player. It was actually just a big country in South America, and although the EC/EU wanted to develop a friendly and cooperative relationship with this country, Brazil was not a priority. Emphasis was given to bloc negotiations through Mercosur. The ‘partnership’ between the parties was mainly economic and there were no great efforts to agree on new instruments to deepen the bilateral relationship.

In the first half of the 2000s everything changed. Brazil was now a country with more developed democratic institutions. The economy was growing and social inequality was being fought. The country strengthened its foreign policy discourse and started acting more as a country with global ambitions. Brazil became a more attractive partner and started being recognized as a leadership in South America and in the developing world. In this context, shared values and historic links were activated to reformulate the terms of EU-Brazil relations. In 2007, the EU recognized that it needed a ‘new approach’ and the establishment of a ‘strategic partnership’ was the path chosen. The relationship was still asymmetrical, but much less than before. On the one hand, Brazil was perceived as ‘growing but fragile’ and in this context the

EU was the perfect partner to help Brazil fulfill its potential. On the other hand, the EU recognized that Brazil was a ‘vital ally for the EU’, a ‘global leader’, a country with which the EU shared a ‘common vision’. The relationship was ‘based on a solid economic reality’ but was not limited in its potential. Brazil was positioned as an equal, a partner for the European structural foreign policy and its goal of consolidating a multilateral system. ‘Strategic partnership’ was the label for the validation of a more ambitious Brazilian foreign policy. It was also the framework that turned Brazil into an equal despite its weaknesses.

In this transitional phase the discourse was intensified. ‘Strategic partnership’ became the term through which a joint endeavor between Brazil and the EU could have a much greater global impact. The language used by the parties was vague, but the broad joint goals of the relationship were clear. It was a relationship sustained by the strong links between Brazil and some Member States and a sense of ‘friendship’ that allowed the parties to claim for a relationship based on complicity. The EU developed a ‘strategic partnership’ in terms that had not been developed with other of its ‘strategic partners’. Climate change, biofuels, triangular cooperation with African countries were topics at the core of the bilateral agenda and which were seen as fundamental for a relationship that claimed to be ‘preparing a fairer world’.

At the Fourth EU-Brazil Summit the bar was raised a bit higher. Language enunciated showed that relationship was based on the idea of ‘commitment’. Interestingly, assertions from one side were immediately echoed by the other. According to the EU and Brazilian representatives, the relationship showed signs of vitality but it could and should be improved. The ‘strategic partnership’ was framed as a relationship in constant development. The achievement of some joint goals should not mean that the relationship had fulfilled its purpose, but that such ‘like-minded’ countries with ‘lots lots of affinity’ should be ‘willing to do more’. According to EU representatives the parties should aim for ‘strategic global action’ and the development of a ‘true political partnership’ to use ‘their privileged position to forge alliances’. ‘[F]riendship’, ‘natural partners’, ‘shared values and goals’, ‘convergence’, ‘powerful force’. These were the ideas that permeated the linguistic context behind ‘strategic partnership’. Despite the emphasis on ‘equality’ found mostly in the declarations of EU representatives Brazil was not Russia, and the discourse of its representatives was restrained. They showed accordance with the suggestions presented by the EU representatives and positioned Brazil as a country indebted to its relationship with Europe. Brazil aimed to be a global actor, and the EU supported this view, but its representatives seemed to lack the confidence. That did not mean that Brazil was restraining from defending its self-interests. The relationship was getting deeper. Sectoral dialogue areas were being expanded. But some disagreements were evident.



They should not be perceived as something essentially bad, but as something inherent to a relationship between strategic partners that aimed to have a joint global impact. According to this logic sensitive topics should be discussed and solutions should be found. More coordinated positions in international forums were expected between actors that did not only share history, but also a 'common destiny'.

The EU-Brazil relationship is still slightly asymmetrical. The 'strategic partnership' is presented as a relationship between equals, but Brazil still hesitates in its positioning as a global actor. However, this is changing. Its leaders are becoming more self-assured and whereas the EU struggles to overcome its own crisis, Brazil is intensifying its relationships with other partners. However, this does not necessarily mean that the relationship will inevitably lose momentum. Despite their different views on multilateralism and on to what extent particular values are translated in foreign policy decisions, the EU and Brazil have a degree of value-sharing that cannot be observed between the EU and its other strategic partners. At some point Brazil will show it is not just the 'side-kick'; however, that does not mean that this will limit the capability of the parties to pursue joint goals. The notion of 'friendship' that permeates the bilateral relationship and the framework of cooperation developed by the parties as strategic partners, will probably guarantee that negotiable solutions and dialogue remain the standard procedure. In addition, the 'historical links', 'shared values', and 'strategic partnerships' between Brazil and several EU-member states, have been creating a sense of complicity that protects Brazil and the EU from stark criticisms regarding the achievements of their 'strategic partnership'. A situation of equality will be reached but that does not mean that the relationship will necessarily be one of conflict. The foundations consolidated by 'strategic partnership' lead to the expectation that the relationship will remain essentially cooperative. The use of this language in the terms explained in the present chapter will help to 'protect' the relationship when the idea of full equality becomes internalized completely by both strategic partners. The current 'rules of the game' suggest that a balanced cooperative relationship will be further developed, which will lead to the search of peacefully agreed solutions between the parties to any disagreements that may come up. In any case, expectations about future developments should be based on the constitutive framework that has been agreed by the parties through the concept of 'strategic partnership'.

## 7 The China-EU ‘Strategic Partnership’

The China-EU relationship is certainly institutionally speaking the most complex of all the EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’. It covers almost 60 sectoral dialogues. It involves periodical consultations in almost all possible areas of cooperation imaginable. From trade and science to climate change and sustainable urbanization, from intercultural to security issues – even one of the most sensitive of all bilateral issues, human rights. All of these issues are granted with a special forum of discussion. It is quite remarkable that a relationship that only started in 1975 with the first visit of a European Commissioner to China, and still follows a trade and economic agreement signed in 1985, would currently present such a breadth in its institutional framework. Such a dynamic relationship is also characterized by some very sensitive issues though. Disagreements are constantly observed and the parties often find themselves trying to manage the dilemma between the necessity to cooperate and pursue what are considered fundamental strategic interests.

In 2011 the EU Service for Foreign Policy Instruments produced a video on behalf of the European External Action Service, which is still available on the EEAS’s website,<sup>104</sup> and it presents a very interesting picture of the scope and challenges associated with this bilateral relationship. The video is narrated on the European side by Kenny Brown from the Europe China Research and Advice Network, and on the Chinese side by Jing Men, professor of EU China Relations at the College of Europe. The idea behind the video was to show how each side perceives the other inside the framework of the bilateral relationship. The video naturally highlights the contemporary relevance of the relationship, stressing that the EU and China are ‘huge political partners’, ‘the world’s biggest trading partners’, and that they ‘call themselves strategic partners’. But the video also discusses the major issues of perception that make cooperation difficult. Professor Jing Men argues that,

‘there is a problem of lack of mutual trust between the EU and China. If you dig deeply you will find out that the Chinese don’t trust the Europeans so much but the Europeans don’t trust the Chinese either. (...) the relationship has been evolving quite rapidly in the sense that economic and trade cooperation has been getting ever closer from both sides but then on the other hand the old problems still remain, for example the arms embargo that the European Union introduced in 1989 (...) and the market economy status requested by the Chinese government is still not granted by the European Union.’

Representing the European perspective on the relationship, Mr. Brown argues however that ‘China is a very reluctant superpower. (...) I think Western powers can also feel that sometimes China free loads.’ This declaration is then followed by the Chinese counterargument: ‘I don’t agree that China is a free-loader because the Chinese have their own

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<sup>104</sup> <<http://eeas.europa.eu/china/flash/index/.html>>, accessed 21 May 2013.

principles; there is the principle of sovereignty, principle of territorial non-interference and for the Chinese to decide to go to Libya, what the French the British do, it will be very difficult because it will violate their own principles.’

The video released by the EEAS is mentioned because it nicely sets the tone of the discussion. Some dilemmas intrinsic to the EU-China bilateral relationship are similar to those found in the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’. It is clear that the parties need to cooperate. It is also clear that the relationship presents a challenge in terms of value-sharing and mutual perception. But from the start it can be said that two characteristics are very different: the scope/breadth of this bilateral relationship and, most importantly, the posturing of the parties, i.e. what kind of positioning acts they perform through the language of ‘strategic partnership’. The EU-China and the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnerships’ have much in common, but they have developed in very different terms. The goal of this chapter is to discuss how the notion of ‘strategic partnership’ has been employed in the context of EU-China relations, and to show how EU and China are developing their complex relationship. It is important to highlight that the EU-China relationship differentiates itself from other EU ‘strategic partnerships’ due to the fact that the parties add the adjective ‘comprehensive’ to the expression ‘strategic partnership’. That occurs quite often and shows the interest of both sides to stress both the breadth and the *sui generis* character of this ‘strategic partnership’.

Finally, some methodological observations must be made. As previously stated, the relationship between China and the EU (initially the European Communities) started in 1975 and is still framed by the 1985 trade agreement. Some important developments also took place in the 1990s. However, due to the method chosen to approach the use of ‘strategic partnership’ in this thesis, given the difficulty in obtaining primary sources in English, and the necessity of specifying a historic period of analysis, this chapter will focus on the EU-China relations from the end of the 1990s to the present. More specifically, it starts from the period when Zhu Rongji became China’s premier and China and the EU organized their first bilateral summit (1998) – to the date of the sixteenth bilateral summit (21 November 2013). Also, due to the complexity of negotiations in multiple sectoral areas and the abundance of quotations from European and Chinese leaders, some historical facts will be omitted. The analysis will follow a chronological order aiming to show the process of reconstruction of the bilateral relationship through the references to the idea of ‘strategic partnership’. Thus, not all bilateral summits will be analyzed in detail. Instead, some summits will be focused on, in which important repositionings from EU and China can be observed more clearly.

## 7.1 Framing a China-EU ‘Strategic Partnership’

### 7.1.1 *The Initial Phase that paved the Way to the ‘(Comprehensive) Strategic Partnership’*

As previously mentioned, this chapter will focus on a more contemporary phase of EU-China relations encompassing the last fifteen years. However, that does not mean that the initial phase of this relationship was not important or should be neglected. Some words on how the relationship was framed in the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s will be given to understand the context in which the EU-China ‘strategic partnership’ was established.

In the 1980s China was certainly a very different country and had a very different international status. The European Union in its present form did not exist either. It was in a context of bipolarity that China and the European Communities signed on 18 September 1985 the *Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation*. The document not only established the basis for trade and economic cooperation between the parties and created a Joint Committee which initiated regular meetings between representatives of both sides in an annual basis; it also presented a conceptual framework for the relationship that is still very much relevant. As a standard practice in diplomatic documents, the preamble of the agreement stressed the interest in developing ‘friendly relations’. In addition, it also introduced some notions that are still considered fundamental for the further development of the bilateral relationship. It can be understood that the parties desired ‘on the basis of equality and mutual advantage, to intensify and diversify their trade and actively develop economic and technical cooperation in line with their mutual interests.’ Attention must be put to these elements of ‘equality’ and ‘mutual advantage’, since they will be constantly present in the language used by the parties to frame their relationship in the next twenty-nine years.

In 1985 the relationship was very straightforward. There was an interest of the parties to improve trade relations and to develop economic and technical cooperation. Unlike the relationships between the EU and its other strategic partners, there was no initial phase in which China was economically dependent on the EU. This led to a relationship that was strongly based on the ideas of ‘equality’ and ‘mutual advantage’ from the outset. It was not only in the preamble that these notions were mentioned. Such was the importance for the parties, especially for China, to make this clear, that again in article 1 of the agreement the parties affirmed that ‘[t]he two Contracting Parties will endeavour, within the framework of their respective existing laws and regulations, and in accordance with the principles of equality and mutual advantage: to promote and intensify trade between them; to encourage the steady expansion of economic cooperation.’

Although pragmatic interests helped to develop trade and economic cooperation, the European Communities had some politico-economic leverage on China and did not refrain from making a statement after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. As retaliation the EC started an arms embargo, which is still one of the most important disagreements between the EU and China. The European side was very clear in its position that human rights violations would not be ignored or tolerated. Nevertheless, it had to develop an approach to China that allowed it to improve bilateral cooperation even in those circumstances. Mattlin (2010, p. 11) explains that in the mid-1990s the recently established European Union would thus initiate an approach to China called ‘positive engagement’ or ‘constructive engagement’. In this context, the EU and China formalized their official political dialogue in 1994, according to which the parties agreed on ‘a series of regular meetings at all levels, including annual Summits at Head of Government level (as of 1998) and ministerial and official level dialogue in a range of areas’.<sup>105</sup>

In July 1995 the European Commission launched the communication *A Long Term Policy for China-Europe Relations*. In the document, the Commission stressed the Chinese as an unmatched phenomenon in the post-Second World War world: ‘Japan made its mark as an economic power, the Soviet Union survived essentially as a military power. China is increasingly strong in both the military-political and the economic spheres’. According to the European Commission, ‘the most important factor in the EU’s image is our policy towards China’ and ‘EU policy should never lose sight of its strategic interests in China’. In many passages of the document it can be seen the necessity found by the Commission to stress the importance of an engagement with the Asian country to ‘develop a long term relationship with China that reflects China’s worldwide, as well as regional, economic and political influence’.

The communication was elaborated in the spirit of the ‘new Asia strategy’ to provide a framework for EU’s approach to China and in this context it presented very clear grounds for EU’s engagement with this Asian country. The main goals of bilateral dialogue for the EU in 1995 were:

- ‘to promote a dialogue on regional and global security issues which encourages full Chinese engagement in the international community through accession to all the key international instruments governing non-proliferation and arms control;
- . to give practical support for the trend towards creating a reformed public management system in China based on civil society and the rule of law;
- . to develop a programme of effective and coordinated cooperation in the legal and judicial fields;
- . to support the principles of the Joint Declarations governing the transfer of sovereignty of Hong Kong and Macau.’

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<sup>105</sup> China Strategy Paper 2007-2013.

Similar to the documents that frame EU's approach to other strategic partners, the tone used by the European Commission was very directive. The EU positioned itself as the partner in condition to provide China with the experience and know-how to help this country reach a stage in which it would be in the position to 'share in the responsibilities and opportunities suited to its rapidly increasing power'. According to the communication '[i]t is in everybody's interest – including that of China itself – to see China demonstrating a cooperative and responsible attitude in the international community'. In the document the European Commission stressed the importance of a responsible international engagement from China to safeguard the stability of the whole system and in this context it argued that 'stability is best served by political, economic and social reform in line with international norms'. Moreover, the document also stated that 'EU interests will therefore be well served by supporting the development in China of institutions and a civil society based on the rule of law'. The communication openly suggested that the EU should seek to have an influence on China: '[w]ithout exaggerating the role that the EU can play, we must use the opportunity offered by participation in regional fora and by bilateral dialogue to promote a responsible and constructive Chinese role in the region'. Thus it can be seen that the notion of 'equality' in the bilateral relationship was not seen by the European Commission as an obstacle to a normative approach to China. The 'positive engagement' pointed out by Mattlin (2011) had certainly also a strong normative dimension, what the author calls an 'offensive normative approach to China' (Mattlin, 2011, p. 16).

That was also very clear when the document mentioned the issue of human rights in the framework of the bilateral relationship. According to the communication:

'[t]he EU will pursue the issue of human rights through action on three levels. First, it will support potential efforts in China to open up and liberalise all areas of Chinese life, in different sections of society as well as different parts of the economy. These trends inevitably reinforce moves towards the development of a civil society based on the rule of law. Second, it will systematically and regularly continue to raise human rights issues in bilateral dialogue with China. Third, it will engage the international community in the dialogue through multilateral fora such as the United Nations. The framework for all these activities is clearly delineated by the common acceptance by both the EU and China of the Declaration and the Programme of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights of Vienna in June 1993.'

The Commission was certainly aware that this kind of statement would not be taken well by the Chinese government. Nevertheless, it kept following the orientation of the EU's approach towards China in not holding back in issues related to the human rights agenda. In the document it is said that '[i]f a deeper partnership is to develop between European and Chinese, openness and interest must be fostered on both sides' and this kind of statement was intended to stress the relevance of the active engagement of both sides to the strengthening of bilateral

relations. However, the communication strongly presented the EU as an actor in a position to influence in China and in this sense contributed to the notion that the EU saw the relationship with China in unbalanced terms. In any case, in 1995 the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue was launched, creating a specific institutional forum to deal with human rights issues and showing the capacity of the EU to influence the bilateral agenda setting.

One last important aspect of the 1995 European Commission communication on China is that in this document the claim is made that the relationship between China and the EU must be a 'comprehensive one'. The communication expressly stated that 'EU policy should seek to promote the objectives that have been described above in a comprehensive way'. This notion will remain very important in all the years of bilateral engagement and will later be used to better characterize the nature of the 'strategic partnership' initiated in 2003.

It is important to note that, like in the EU-Brazil 'strategic partnership', the relationship between the EU and China has a strong regional component. EU-China relations have been developing along a process of approximation between Europe and Asia. The EU-China bilateral dialogue and the Europe-Asia cooperation are processes that have been mutually reinforcing each other in the last two decades. The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), for example, is a bi-regional forum that has been very important for EU and China to position themselves vis-à-vis the other and further develop the terms of their relationship. In the speeches made by EU and Chinese representatives at ASEM Summits many expressions and notions are used which are related to the language enunciated within the framework of the bilateral relationship. In 1996, for example, in the first ASEM Summit Chinese Premier Li Peng argued that,

'[t]oday, we, leaders of 25 Asian and European countries meet here for the first time. On the basis of equality and in a friendly manner, we will exchange views on cooperation in a wide range of areas and on the building of a new Asia-Europe partnership oriented towards the 21st century. It is a pioneering endeavor of historic significance. It reflects the widely-shared desire of Asian and European countries for world peace and development for inter-continental exchanges and cooperation'.

This quote stresses the importance attached to the mutual interest on both sides to strengthen their ties. At the same time, it frames cooperation both as a relationship of equals and as an interaction between friends, which is a conceptual framework also found in the enunciations of European and Chinese representatives regarding their bilateral relationship. On the one hand, the parties should behave in a 'friendly manner', i.e. in a high collaborative fashion. On the other hand, 'equality' should guarantee independence from each side to pursue its own interests and follow their own path. A comparison of the speeches of European and Chinese representatives in bi-regional and bilateral forums shows that the rules of engagement proposed by the parties in bilateral and bi-regional scopes are quite similar. In this case, it shows

how the language used in the context of the EU-China relationship spills over into the language used in a much broader scope.

### ***7.1.2 The Establishment of a ‘Comprehensive Partnership’***

1998 was a very special year for EU-China relations. On 25 March the European Commission published a Communication entitled *Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China* and some days after this document was disclosed, European and Chinese representatives met for the first EU-China summit in London on 2 April. The Commission’s *Communication* is a very important source for understanding the kind of relationship the parties were establishing at that point. It not only framed the relationship as a ‘comprehensive partnership’, but also explained what the employment of this term meant for the rules of EU-China relations in the view of the EU. Thus, some important excerpts of this document should be discussed.

Like other documents prepared by the EU, this communication had also a very directive character. For example, the headings of the three first sections of the document are ‘Engaging China further in the international community’, ‘Supporting China's transition to an open society based on the rule of law and the respect for human rights’, and ‘Integrating China further in the world economy’. All reveal the strong feeling on the European side that the EU had a role to play in helping China integrate in the institutions of the global international society. On the other hand, this directive component is contrasted by some enunciations that show that the EU saw the bilateral relationship in quite different terms. Actually the notions of ‘equality’ and ‘friendship’ were once more merged in a way that the relationship was portrayed as a relationship between equals in which the EU, as a collaborator/friend would conduct China to the right path to achieve its full potential. One illustrative passage said that the communication aimed at setting the grounds for a ‘comprehensive partnership’ which has as its ‘focal point’ the goal of ensuring ‘the successful and lasting integration of China as an equal partner in the world economy. This should be coupled with an active commitment to creating a strong and open civil society based on fundamental freedoms and human rights, in step with China's move towards a market economy.’

Indeed, almost like a mantra, in the communication *Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China* one can read over and over again how fundamental the relationship with China is and the goals of the EU with the establishment of a ‘comprehensive partnership with China’. For example, the document argued that ‘[e]ngaging China’s emerging economic and political power, as well as integrating China into the international community, may prove



one of the most important external policy challenges facing Europe and other partners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.’ Another excerpt stressed that ‘[t]he EU's prime objectives must be to see China integrated rapidly and fully into the international community, both politically and economically, and to support its transition towards an open society based upon the rule of law: this will facilitate both development in China and greater global stability.’ Particularly in terms of agenda setting, the EU claimed that through the ‘comprehensive EU-China partnership’ the EU should aim at ‘engaging China further, through an upgraded political dialogue, in the international community’, ‘[s]upporting China's transition to an open society based upon the rule of law and the respect for human rights’, ‘[i]ntegrating China further in the world economy by bringing it more fully into the world trading system and by supporting the process of economic and social reform underway in the country’, ‘[m]aking Europe's funding go further’, and ‘[r]aising the EU's profile in China’.

The document also tried to explain how the EU intends to achieve these goals. According to the communication, the strategy of ‘comprehensive engagement’ with China was based on ‘a renewed and upgraded EU-China bilateral political dialogue, as well as through the greater involvement of China in both regional and multilateral initiatives of global interest’. In this context, the document proposed that the EU and China should hold ‘annual summits at Head of State and Government level’, which ‘would put the EU-China relationship on a commensurate footing with the EU’s approach towards other major international partners such as the US, Japan and Russia, raise the profile of the EU in China and vice versa, as well as inject added momentum into the negotiation and resolution of key issues in the EU-China relationship.’ Here one can see the importance of establishing the necessary instruments not only to promote bilateral dialogue, but also to place China in a different position, thus showing the rest of the world that China deserved a different status in the hierarchy of partners of the EU.

The document made clear that the EU recognized the differentiated status of China in the global international society. That was one of the main justifications for establishing a ‘comprehensive partnership’. And it is very interesting to see that already in 1998 the EU aimed at developing this relationship in a regional context and also at dealing with security matters. As argued earlier, EU and China had also been developing their political dialogue in a regional context through the ASEM process. But in this 1998 communication, the EU also stressed the importance of using ‘ASEAN-sponsored regional fora’ to develop cooperation aimed at promoting stability in the Asian continent. The communication argued that ‘[t]he growing demand for a multilateral security dialogue in East Asia provides opportunities for Europe to

increase its overall influence in the region. As the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) develops further, and as China shows willingness to engage further in confidence-building measures in Asia, the EU should use this forum more systematically to discuss security issues with China.’ The fact that already in 1998 the EU saw the necessity to develop cooperation in security matters within the framework of the ‘comprehensive partnership’ is a feature that cannot be observed in the initial framework of the relationship with Brazil, for example.

The last aspect of this communication to be discussed is the fact that it indeed presented EU-China cooperation as an instrument of influence of the EU on China. Regarding human rights issues, for example, it pointed out that China was improving but that ‘the full respect for universal standards in the field of human rights remains incomplete’. Hence, it is important to realize when one is trying to understand how the EU framed the notion of a ‘comprehensive partnership’ with China that the EU did not ignore the dimension and status of China in the international society. Since the beginning the language used made reference to the notion of ‘equality’. However, the acknowledgement of China’s weight in the international society and of a relationship between equals did not mean that the bilateral relationship was not taken as a means to act normatively upon China. The ‘comprehensive partnership’ presented from its beginning a very normative component, which the Chinese leadership would try to neutralize.

In this context, on 2 April 1998 Chinese and EU representatives met in London for the first EU-China summit. The first summit concentrated on economic and trade issues, including China’s accession to the World Trade Organization and responses to the Asian Financial crisis, and on the EU-China human rights dialogue. In the *Summit Joint Statement*, EU and Chinese leaders ‘expressed their hope to build a long-term, stable and constructive partnership (...) for the twenty-first century’. And indeed, already in 1998 some important initiatives were put into practice. As the *Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the implementation of the Communication ‘Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China’* (2000) pointed out, in 1998 the financing agreement for the *EU-China Legal and Judicial Co-operation Programme* was signed. Other programmes were launched in the same year like the *Junior Managers Programme* and the *Euro-China Academic Network*. In addition, one of the highlights of bilateral cooperation in 1998 was the signing in December of the *Scientific and Technological Co-operation Agreement*, which became effective one year later.

One feature of the EU-Chinese relationship important to stress is the fact that there was a mutual recognition from both sides that the bilateral relationship represented a possibility for achieving priority shared goals. By the end of the 1990s the EU saw its engagement with China as a means *inter alia* to promote regional stability, to gain access to an important market, to

promote human rights in the country. On the other hand, for China the relationship with the EU also transcended mere economic calculations. It was also a means to achieve other goals like the recognition of the market-economy status and gain support to sovereign claims. In this context, one of the highlights of 1999 within EU-China relations was the declaration issued in July by the presidency of the Council of the European Union which recalled the EU's adherence to the 'one China' principle.<sup>106</sup> The 'comprehensive partnership' was not only an instrument for the EU to achieve its goals. China also had some expectations about what could be achieved through a closer relationship with the EU and the issue of Taiwan recognition was one in which China had the European support.

Although the EU supported the Chinese official discourse regarding Taiwan, it did not refrain from positioning itself against some Chinese practices. During the second EU-China summit, which took place in December 1999, the EU brought to the table matters such as Chinese dumping practices, Chinese protectionism in areas like agriculture, telecommunications and baking sector, and Chinese human rights records, stressing among other issues the European dissatisfaction with the Chinese handling of the Tibetan issue and the application of the death penalty.<sup>107</sup> The fact that these issues composed the agenda of the meeting organized in Beijing, show the predominant role of the EU in the setting of the bilateral agenda.

*The Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the implementation of the Communication 'Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China* from 8 September 2000 in fact confirmed that the EU was overall satisfied with the latest developments of the 'comprehensive partnership':

'[s]ince the Communication was adopted, the EU-China relationship has greatly intensified. The first annual EU-China summits in 1998 and 1999 laid the groundwork for a more broadly based political dialogue. At the same time, an increasing succession of meetings and dialogues at all levels, and in numerous areas of concern both to the EU and to China, improved communication and promoted mutual understanding.'

However, despite some positive achievements in bilateral relations – even in the area of human rights – the document firmly criticized the 'deterioration' of civil and political rights in China:

'[t]here have also been, since 1998, positive achievements with regard to China's participation in international human rights mechanisms. These include the visits of UN Human Rights Commissioner

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<sup>106</sup> *Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the implementation of the Communication 'Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China'* [COM (2000) 552 final], 8 September 2000.

<sup>107</sup> La UE exige a China mayor apertura en derechos humanos: Los contenciosos comerciales enfrentan a Bruselas y Pekín, *La Vanguardia*, 22 December 1999.

Mary Robinson to China in September 1998 and March 2000, and the signing by China of the *UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* as well, in October 1998.

While there has been gradual improvement in economic and social rights, and progress towards the strengthening of the rule of law, there has been a lack of progress, and even a deterioration, in the area of civil and political rights. Repression of political dissidence, arbitrary detention conditions, the extensive use of the death penalty, the repression of ethnic minorities - including in Tibet, restrictions on religious freedom, rights of association and free speech, among others, continue to be major concerns for the EU.'

In spite of these concerns candidly made by the European institutions, 2000 was being a good year for EU-China relations. As stated in the same report of the European Commission, on 19 May 2000 EU and China signed an agreement on the Chinese accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). From the European perspective, the agreement was positive and a chance to strengthen the partnership. Challenges related to Chinese compliance to WTO rules should not be seen as a confrontation:

'[i]n anticipation of China's imminent accession to the WTO, the EU needs to look ahead to see how this will affect our trade relations. China will require assistance to meet its WTO commitments. The Commission will continue to develop new channels of communication with the Chinese authorities, to monitor the implementation of China's WTO commitments, and to identify instances where China faces difficulties in adhering to these obligations. Implementation should be a matter of partnership, not a source of confrontation, and will need to involve members of the European business community more closely, as they will be best placed to identify whether or not China is meeting its obligations. The EU can then seek to help China overcome any difficulties through targeted, technical assistance and the strengthening of regulatory dialogues in key areas'.

The way the Commission addressed the issue was very interesting in the document because it presented China as a party that would 'require assistance'. That is itself already very meaningful since without portraying China as the junior partner in the relationship, the report presents China as a country looking for European guidance in the pursuit of its goals. Yet by arguing that the challenges that would emerge during Chinese accession should be addressed in a spirit of 'partnership' – i.e. not confrontation –, the Commission presents its view of 'partnership' as a relationship that may face some challenges but in which these challenges are dealt with in a non-confrontational manner.

This was an understanding of the rules of the relationship that both parties were willing to consolidate. In July of 2000 Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji visited Brussels and during an interview with Hong Kong journalists he was asked 'What kind of demands will we make? How can the bilateral agreement between China and the EU achieve the most satisfactory results and eliminate trade barriers on both sides?', Premier Zhu replied saying: 'I don't think there are any major issues between China and the EU. There will always be small differences and minor problems in trade, but it doesn't seem necessary to discuss them at our level' (Zhu, 2011, p.

277).<sup>108</sup> By arguing that he was aware of some differences and problems between China and the EU but minimizing their weight, Premier Zhu favored the idea that disagreements were possible within the framework of the ‘comprehensive partnership’ but they would not lead to any major crises in the relationship.

Some months later, at the ASEM Summit in Seoul on 20 October 2000, Premier Zhu made a very similar statement in his speech titled *Towards a New Century-Oriented Asia-Europe Partnership*. EU and Chinese discourses on the regional level are to some extent a projection of the discourses found within their bilateral framework and this becomes very clear in this quote:

‘[w]ith no conflict of fundamental interests, Asia and Europe have maintained good political relations. Of course, it is inevitable that frictions of one kind or another may occur between the two sides in the process of cooperation and contacts. However, so long as our two sides adhere to the principles of respecting each other, treating each other as equals, seeking common ground while shelving differences and seeking consensus, and earnestly conduct political dialogue, we will be able to deepen mutual understanding, reduce differences, increase trust, expand consensus by seeking the convergence of our common interests, and make ASEM a model for intercontinental cooperation based on equality and an important force for promoting the establishment of a fair and reasonable new international political and economic order. We look forward to and are full of confidence in the establishment of a long-term stable partnership based on equality between Asia and Europe. China stands ready to work with other ASEM members for an even brighter future for Asia and Europe and the world as a whole’.<sup>109</sup>

This example shows how the notions of ‘partnership’ implemented by the EU and China on bilateral and bi-regional level are very similar. In both contexts the parties support the idea that a ‘partnership’ is a relationship between equals in which disagreements are possible and through political dialogue, mutual understanding and trust, they may be overcome. Through a reduction of these differences, the parties may converge their interests further and deepen their cooperation further. The fact that in 2000 that kind of rationale could be found both in the speeches of the Chinese Premier and in the text of a Communication written by the European Commission, shows the presence of a successful speech act regarding the terms of the ‘comprehensive partnership’. At that time both parties were much aware and agreed with their shared understanding of ‘comprehensive partnership’ and to the limits of acceptable behavior within the bilateral relationship: disagreements should not be taken as a crisis as long as the parties were in a balanced position to try to come up with an agreed solution.

The EU and China seemed to be aware of the basic framework of their relationship and were thus also aware of challenges and opportunities. In the *China’s EU Policy Paper*, launched on 13 October 2003, the Chinese government would describe 2001 as the year when the EU

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<sup>108</sup> Zhu Rongji (2011) ‘In Brussels. On Sino-EU Relations, International Cooperation over Illegal Immigration and Security Issues’ in: Zhu Rongji, *Zhu Rongji meets the press*, pp. 277-280.

<sup>109</sup> Zhu Rongji (2000) *Towards a New Century-Oriented Asia-Europe Partnership*, Seoul, 20 October 2000.

and China managed to establish a ‘full partnership’ by developing ‘an ever closer consultation and fruitful cooperation in the political, economic, trade, scientific, cultural and educational fields.’ However, in 2001, despite the overall positive attitude towards bilateral cooperation, the evaluation inside the European institutions was that more progress should be achieved. In the Communication *EU Strategy towards China: Implementation of the 1998 Communication and Future Steps for a more Effective EU Policy*, approved on 15 May 2001, the Commission described China as a difficult partner: ‘**China is not always an easy partner for the EU**. Its political system is unlike that of most other major third countries with which the EU has significant and growing relations, and EU concerns over key issues such as human rights affect and strain relations at times.’<sup>110</sup> However, the Commission recognized that it was also the responsibility of the EU to try to improve its own policies towards China to obtain better results: ‘[d]iscussion of China in the framework of the Council in early 2001 revealed a consensus that the existing policy towards China and the EU’s longer term aims in relations with China, as defined by the Commission Communication and the resulting Council Conclusions in 1998, remain basically valid. However, both objectives and instruments could and should be fine-tuned and operational goals for the short and medium term could be achieved by setting down action points in order to make EU policy more effective’.

The document shows that the EU representatives were aware of the difficulties associated with a cooperative engagement with China and to the initial phase in which the relationship found itself at that moment. In another passage in the document, the Commission argued that, ‘[s]upporting China’s transition to an **open society** based on the **rule of law** and the respect for **human rights** is central to EU-China relations and will be so for years to come. There is much to do’.<sup>111</sup> Another interesting excerpt shows that this evaluation on the European side reads: ‘[r]elations with China will be a major opportunity and challenge for the EU for years to come’. And the major challenges identified by the EU related to the engagement with China were ‘in particular China’s political and economic integration into the international community and the opening of China with the full respect of internationally recognized human rights standards and the rule of law’. Finally the main message transmitted by the document was that a successful EU-China comprehensive partnership was not the work of one single partner in conditions to completely steer the relationship towards a desired direction: ‘[u]ltimately a successful relationship is based on two willing and committed partners. Building a comprehensive EU-China partnership will therefore require the commitment and engagement of both sides. Much has been achieved so far. But more needs to be done to develop the full potential of the relationship.’

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<sup>110</sup> Words highlighted in the original text.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

It was with this evaluation in mind that the EU representatives met their Chinese counterparts in Brussels for their fourth EU-China summit. The summit *Joint Press Statement* stressed as usual the joint goals of EU-China cooperation and reinforced the bases of the relationship as ‘mutual respect and equality’. However, worth highlighting is the passage of the statement in which China thanked the EU for the support for China’s accession to the WTO that would take place in December of that year:

‘China expressed its thanks to the European Union for its long-standing support for China’s entry into the WTO. China also welcomed the European Union’s willingness to continue existing, and undertake additional, efforts to help China in this area, both through co-operation programmes and through dialogue in key areas. Leaders expressed their full support for a broad-based new round of multilateral trade negotiations under the principle of balanced interests for the benefit of all WTO members.’

This quote is interesting for showing China’s recognition of a situation in which bilateral cooperation was not only effective, it counted the help of the EU to achieve a key policy goal. It is in no way a declaration of weakness, but an acknowledgment that the EU can really be a fundamental partner for China in the pursuit of priority goals. Moreover, it reinforced the European assumption that the EU was in a position to influence China’s integration into the global market economy. Hence, this statement was naturally not the recognition of the existence of a junior partner in the EU-China relations, but it showed that the parties agreed on an internal positioning in the bilateral relationship according to which the EU would have this function of facilitating the integration of China into global institutions and that China was pleased with cooperation with the EU in this sense.

On 1 March 2002 the Commission launched the *Country Strategy Paper: China (2002-2006)*. The document presented China as an actor that supported multipolarity in order to contain US hegemony. By seeing China as a ‘growing military and economic power’ that was not happy with the role of the US as ‘dominant superpower’, the country strategy paper foresaw a future of tensions between both countries. In this context, being a partner of both US and China, the EU assumed an important role of mediation of these tensions. A positive trust-building engagement with China was thus essential. The *Country Strategy Paper* presented three focal points of EU-China cooperation. The first point was ‘to support and provide increased sustainability in China’s economic and social reform process mainly through institutional strengthening and capacity building, human resources development and the promotion of a sound business regulatory framework and the transfer of know-how and technology in the private sector.’ The second point was related to sustainable development. The EU would be ‘assisting China to pursue a better balance between environmental protection, social development and economic growth’. Finally, the third point was ‘to encourage good governance initiatives, promote the rule of law, promote grass-roots democracy and the

implementation of economic, social and political and civil rights and strengthening of the structures and processes that make up the fabric of a strong civil society'. The Country Strategy Paper announced grants worth 250 million Euros from the Community budget for cooperation with China in the following five years.

In the *Country Strategy Paper* the overall impression presented was that EU-China cooperation had its challenges but was moving forward. On 24 September 2002 the Fifth EU-China Summit was scheduled to take place in Copenhagen. But before the event took place Denmark's Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen defined the relationship in the following terms:

'[t]he good relationship between the EU and China is steadily progressing. However, we have a well-developed dialogue on many subjects and at different levels. Relations have matured to a point where the political dialogue on international topics of mutual interest has come to play a key role. At the same time, it is constructive that we are able to discuss issues on which the EU and China do not see eye to eye. This applies, among other things, to an issue such as human rights.'<sup>112</sup>

The tone of European evaluations was that the relationship was progressing, maturing, and that was positive. The only major issue was the Chinese human rights records. European leaders did not refrain from criticizing China on this issue. It must be stressed that meeting within the framework of the Human Rights Dialogue kept taking place, but the opinion in Europe was that China was not making enough efforts to address these issues.

The fifth EU-China summit did not bring anything new to the conceptual framework of the 'comprehensive partnership'. In the summit's *Joint Statement*, the EU reinforced its adherence to the 'one China principle' and desire of a negotiable solution to the dispute of Taiwan. One year after the 9/11 attacks, terrorism was addressed and the parties argued that in such a context 'it was more important than ever to improve international co-operation and co-ordination in a spirit of mutual trust, benefit and equality, and to address the challenges of development and peaceful resolution of disputes.' Again, EU and China 'stressed their resolve to expand and deepen further EU-China co-operation in all areas on the basis of equality and mutual benefit and to promote the development of a comprehensive partnership between the EU and China'. Even regarding human rights, the document lowered the level of European criticism towards China and read: '[t]he two sides agreed to continue their human rights dialogue on the basis of equality and mutual respect and reconfirmed their commitment to work towards achieving meaningful and positive results.'

When one looks at the declarations and documents published by China and the EU, jointly or individually, it is remarkable how both sides felt the necessity to say, repeat, and

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<sup>112</sup> Rasmussen before the 5<sup>th</sup> EU-China Summit. 24 September 2002, <[http://www.stm.dk/p\\_12621.html](http://www.stm.dk/p_12621.html)>, accessed 24 July 2013.



stress that the basis of their cooperation was clear and consensual. The repetition of terms and expressions like ‘equality’, ‘mutual benefit’, ‘mutual trust’, etc, gives the impression that the relationship was controlled and stable. However, following developments would bring a new conceptual framework for this relationship.

### ***7.1.3 EU and China establish a ‘(Comprehensive) Strategic Partnership’***

2003 was marked by important positionings on the part of the EU and China concerning the framework of their bilateral relationship. Without a doubt, the coordination of both sides to adopt policy papers describing their expectations about EU-China relations initiated a new phase in their cooperation efforts. In order to understand what kind of repercussion these policy papers had for the constitution of the rules of EU-China relations, each one should be addressed in detail.

On 10 September 2003, the Communication *A maturing partnership – shared interests and challenges in EU-China relations* was adopted in its final version in Brussels. The document, which aimed to update the previous communications launched in 1998 and 2001, was adopted in a moment when President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao were initiating a new political cycle in China. But the new phase was not only related to political transition in the country and enhanced engagement in international affairs. According to the Communication, ‘[m]uch has changed in Europe, China and the world since the Commission’s last policy paper was issued in early 2001’<sup>113</sup> and ‘both sides have to adapt to a fast moving international scene, with terrorism, weapons proliferation and other concerns, such as the threat of SARS, rising to the top of the agenda. The sluggish world economy and concomitant negative trends in protectionism and regionalism also loom as potential threats to global trade and development.’<sup>114</sup>

It should be recalled that already in June 2003 the EU had adopted its *European Security Strategy*, in which, by acknowledging the beginning of a new period in international politics, the EU found itself in need of an intensified relationship with key global actors. And in the communication *A maturing partnership* the EU reinforced the idea of China being such a key global actor and thus an essential partner of the EU. In this communication China was for the first time ‘recognized’ as ‘one of the EU’s major strategic partners.’

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<sup>113</sup> Words highlighted in the original text.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

The use for the first time of the concept ‘strategic partnership’ to frame the bilateral relationship shows that the EU wanted to state for China and the rest of the world that China-EU relations had a differentiated and superior status in comparison to other cooperative initiatives developed between the EU and other partners. According to the communication, ‘the dynamic growth of the relationship between the EU and China’ in the last decade, brought ‘a new maturity in the relationship, characterized by increasingly close policy co-ordination in many areas.’

In this context, the EU-China ‘strategic partnership’ was characterized in the EU policy paper as a relationship based on shared foreign policy views. The EU presented the Chinese foreign policy as ‘progressively more proactive and constructive’ and stressed the shared feeling attached to the ‘importance of multilateral systems and rules for global governance’.

According to the EU:

‘the EU and China have an ever-greater interest to work together as strategic partners to safeguard and promote sustainable development, peace and stability. Interests converge on many international governance issues, notably the importance both attach to the role of the UN in physical and environmental security and to that of the WTO, where both have much to gain from further trade liberalisation. Indeed, the growth in the bilateral trade relationship is striking: two-way trade exceeded €115 bn last year, making China Europe’s third largest trading partner, albeit with a substantial surplus in China’s favour. Moreover, EU firms remain important investors in China. Mutually beneficial co-operation in the JHA, scientific and technical fields has also been growing apace in recent years, with a number of new agreements in process, and the EC’s assistance programme continues at significant levels.’<sup>115</sup>

Here, I would like to point out the direct language used by the EU in this Communication. One should not ignore the importance of values for the constitution of foreign policy interests, but nowhere in the EU justification on why it and China should cooperate, was the importance of shared values stressed. Different to the contextualization made in other EU ‘strategic partnerships’, the EU-China relationship was presented as a relationship based on clear common ‘interests’. The rationale presented was that ‘[t]hrough a further reinforcement of their co-operation, the EU and China [would] be better able to promote these shared visions and interests, and thus to shore up their joint security and other interests in Asia and elsewhere.’ Common values are not the foundation of their cooperation. In the EU’s view, European values would be added to the formula of cooperation to promote a change in China’s political system and secure the possibility of a long term successful cooperation. It was in this context that the Communications text argued that **‘Europe thus has a major political and economic stake in supporting China’s successful transition to a stable, prosperous and open country that fully embraces democracy, free market principles and the rule of law.’** The EU has much to

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

offer here, stemming in part from its own experience in integrating accession countries from East and Central Europe.<sup>116</sup>

The previous excerpt is important because it shows the EU comparing the development of a ‘strategic partnership’ with China using the same approach it had to countries of Central and Eastern Europe taking place at that time, which would later culminate with their accession to the EU in May 2004. It is remarkable how the EU positioned China as a country which must pass through a process of transition to incorporate and internalize values taken as essential for the success of EU-China cooperation, and how the EU positioned itself as the party with a special role within the ‘strategic partnership’ to enable this successful transitional process. This is important when one looks into the other claims made by the EU in the communication regarding the terms of the bilateral relationship. It seems a contradiction that on the one hand the EU clearly frames the relationship as an asymmetrical relationship and on the other hand claims that ‘[d]eveloping a **robust, enduring and mutually beneficial relationship of equals** (...) should be a **major aim for both the EU and China** in the coming years.’<sup>117</sup> However, these two acts of positioning are not mutually exclusive. The EU knew that China would never accept an asymmetrical relationship. As observed in the declarations from Chinese representatives in the previous years, ‘equality’ was the basic fundament of bilateral cooperation for China. In this context, it was essential that the EU acknowledged this rule in the relationship. Nevertheless, another rule had been establishing itself: the agreement that disagreements were a reality in a relationship between equals and that the parties should be able to express their dissatisfaction with practices of their strategic partners and even to try to make an effort to revert these practices. The China-EU ‘strategic partnership’ was thus characterized by the tension – often observed in relationship based on equality and between global actors – between absence of an internal hierarchy and the efforts of the parties to conciliate shared interests and individual interests. This is a challenge that could be observed in the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’ and explains this duality in the EU discourse towards China of trying to show an acceptance of the boundaries drawn by the parties regarding symmetry while not abdicating of trying to pursue a normative agenda aimed at promoting change from inside.

It is in this context that the EU, with the communication *A maturing partnership*, proposed a relationship in which it recognized China’s weight and the necessity of balanced relations. It also created space for critique on some of the practices of the Chinese government.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

In the communication it can be observed, for example, the insistence of the EU in making clear its dissatisfaction with the slowly incorporation by China of international human rights law:

‘a **significant gap** still exists **between the current human rights situation in China and internationally accepted standards**, in particular with respect to civil and political rights. As noted in the General Affairs Council conclusions of 18 March 2003, a number of **serious EU concerns remain**. China has still not ratified the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The practice of re-education through labour persists. The death penalty continues to be applied extensively, in particular in the context of the “strike hard” campaign. Freedom of expression, religion and association are still not guaranteed, in particular with respect to pro-democracy, labour and internet activists, and ethnic minorities, notably in Tibet and Xinjiang, are still deprived of their religious and cultural rights.’<sup>118</sup>

Human rights were not the only target of EU’s complaints though. In the communication, the EU claimed also for changes from the Chinese government in its posturing regarding WTO commitments. The EU asked China ‘**to act as a constructive and responsible player in the world economy**’.<sup>119</sup> The message taken from these criticisms of China was that for the EU it was clear that a ‘strategic partnership’ did not only sustain itself through the magnitude of trade and the amplitude of the bilateral cooperative engagement. According to the EU, the ‘strategic partnership’ should emphasize ‘quality over quantity of dialogue’. Within the limits of the respect for equality, it was essential for the EU that dialogue could produce visible results in accordance to the many shared interests identified by the parties.

A month after the EU Communication was disclosed, it was China’s turn to launch a policy paper concerning strictly the relationship with the EU. The *China’s EU Policy Paper* is an interesting framework document of the bilateral relationship because it shows the terms proposed by the EU agreed by the Chinese government and how China positioned itself within the ‘strategic partnership’. In the policy paper the EU was presented as ‘major force in the world’ and the Chinese government underlined its appreciation of ‘the importance the EU and its members attach to developing relations with China’.

What is worth noting in the document presented by the Chinese government as an instrument to outline the areas of cooperation for the following five years to ‘enhance China-EU all-round cooperation and promote a long-term and stable development of China-EU relations’ are the goals pointed out by the Chinese government of cooperation with the EU. To some extent, China seemed to agree with the goals presented by the EU in the communication *A mature partnership* regarding the promotion of peace and stability. However, the way China’s policy goals were listed and presented were visibly different. The Chinese authorities listed the following policy goals for EU-China cooperation:

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

‘-- To promote a sound and steady development of China-EU political relations under the principles of mutual respect, mutual trust and seeking common ground while reserving differences, and contribute to world peace and stability;

-- To deepen China-EU economic cooperation and trade under the principles of mutual benefit, reciprocity and consultation on an equal basis, and promote common development;

-- To expand China-EU cultural and people-to-people exchanges under the principle of mutual emulation, common prosperity and complementarity, and promote cultural harmony and progress between the East and the West.’

Therein it can be observed that the emphasis placed by China on the goals of the relationship lay much less on the results of cooperation than on the nature and rules of the bilateral engagement that was being developed. China’s concern was to guarantee that both sides would agree that the relationship should not be perceived by any of the parties involved as asymmetrical. Worth pointing out are the principles highlighted in the document, such as: ‘mutual respect’, ‘mutual trust’, ‘mutual benefit’, ‘reciprocity and consultation on an equal basis’, ‘mutual emulation’, ‘common prosperity’, ‘complementarity’. The Chinese government was evidently showing its accordance to those principles pointed out by the European authorities regarding the rules of the relationship, but it also positioned itself with respect to the European positioning made in the European communication. In its policy paper the Chinese government wanted to assure that its European counterparts understood that if the EU saw itself as an actor within the bilateral partnership that had its own private agenda and much to contribute to Chinese adaptation to Western standards, China was also in a position to defend its own interests and make its counterpart understand its view on particular sensitive issues.

In the Chinese document, some goals for cooperation in political aspects were presented and these were the headlines: ‘1. Strengthen the exchange of high-level visits and political dialogue’, ‘2. Strictly abide by the one-China principle’, ‘3. Encourage Hong Kong and Macao’s cooperation with the EU’, ‘4. Promote the EU’s understanding of Tibet’, ‘5. Continue the human rights dialogue’, ‘6. Strengthen international cooperation’, ‘7. Enhance mutual understanding between Chinese and European legislative organs’, ‘8. Increase exchanges between political parties in China and the EU’. In this listing it can be seen that the Chinese government showed its concern with the promotion and intensification of dialogue and mutual understanding. But it also stood out the fact that China expected from the EU a particular ‘strategic partner’ behavior about core Chinese interests. In this context, it should be stressed that the policy paper reserved a special attention for adequate European behavior regarding topics related to the integrity of Chinese territory and sovereignty rights with respect to Taiwan and Tibet. Concerning Taiwan, the document claimed that it was ‘important that the EU’:

‘-- Prohibit any visit by any Taiwan political figures to the EU or its member countries under whatever name or pretext; not to engage in any contact or exchange of an official or governmental nature with Taiwan authorities.

-- Not to support Taiwan's accession to or participation in any international organization whose membership requires statehood. Taiwan's entry into the WTO in the name of “separate customs territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Jinmen, Mazu” (or Chinese Taipei for short) does not mean any change in Taiwan’s status as part of China. EU exchanges with Taiwan must be strictly unofficial and non-governmental.

-- Not to sell to Taiwan any weapon, equipment, goods, materials or technology that can be used for military purposes.’

China, through the language of ‘strategic partnership’, conditioned the EU’s possibility to relate in an official way to Taiwan. It demanded complete respect to the one-China principle.

Regarding Tibet, Chinese orientation was that it,

‘[e]ncourages personages of various circles in the EU to visit Tibet and welcomes the support of the EU and its members to Tibet's economic, cultural, educational and social development and their cooperation with the autonomous region subject to full respect of China's laws and regulations. The Chinese side requests the EU side not to have any contact with the “Tibetan government in exile” or provide facilities to the separatist activities of the Dalai clique.’

China demonstrated a very assertive posture in the document. The Chinese government was clear to argue that some sorts of behavior were not in line with the terms set out by both parties in the ‘strategic partnership’. ‘Strategic partnership’ with the EU was only possible as long as the European side understood and held allegiance to these principles.

Regarding another sensitive issue, human rights, the response to the EU in the policy paper was that ‘[t]he Chinese side appreciates the EU’s persistent position for dialogue and against confrontation and stands ready to continue dialogue, exchange and cooperation on human rights with the EU on the basis of equality and mutual respect’. On this subject, again the Chinese strategy was to maintain the status quo, to support the continuity of the dialogue and avoid a relationship of ‘confrontation’ while using the principles of ‘equality’ and ‘mutual respect’ to legitimize its lack of will to give in. In fact, it was very clear that the document aimed at arguing that the parties should not perceive each other as a threat. Reinforcing a notion that had been introduced for quite some time in the relationship already, conflicts of opinion should not be understood as a failure of cooperation but as a normal feature of cooperation. Another illuminating passage of the document in this sense read:

‘[t]here is no fundamental conflict of interest between China and the EU and neither side poses a threat to the other. However, given their differences in historical background, cultural heritage, political system and economic development level, it is natural that the two sides have different views or even disagree on some issues. Nevertheless China-EU relations of mutual trust and mutual benefit cannot and will not be affected if the two sides address their disagreements in a spirit of equality and mutual respect.’

Hence, instead of focusing on the disagreements, the Chinese government encouraged the complementarity between China and the EU. The main idea was that shared interests outweighed the relevance of disagreements. The focus should be on the ‘broad prospect for

bilateral trade and economic and technological cooperation'. Concerning the EU criticisms of Chinese commercial policy, China showed once again its assertiveness by making its own criticisms and demands to the EU:

'[it is important to (...) [g]ive play to the mechanism of the economic and trade joint committee and step up economic and trade regulatory policy dialogue; give attention to updating the Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement between China and the European Union at an appropriate time; properly address irrational restrictions and technical barriers, ease restrictions on high-tech exports and tap the enormous potential of technological cooperation and trade in line with the WTO rules; grant China a full market economy status at an early date, reduce and abolish anti-dumping and other discriminatory policies and practices against China, and apply the Transitional Product-Specific Safeguard Mechanism (TPSSM) prudently; and compensate the Chinese side for its economic and trade losses which may arise due to the EU enlargement.'

It is interesting that while it is claimed in the document that the parties should not adopt a confrontational posture towards the other, the Chinese government was emphatic in defending its interests, opposing European criticisms and claiming for the EU to take measures in benefit of Chinese interests. Besides the differences of opinion on trade, the policy paper also claimed for a different behavior of the EU with respect to bilateral military cooperation. Once more, the major claim was that the EU should lift the arms embargo imposed on China.

In short, in China's *EU Policy Paper* the Chinese government agreed to the general terms of reference of the bilateral relationship presented by the Commission in its communication, but also tried to reframe them according to its own interests. Some principles of cooperation had been stressed, for the Chinese side it was fundamental to establish a balance of forces within the bilateral relationship, and that China aimed to adopt a more assertive positioning also in order to sustain the rules of the relationship which Chinese authorities were so insistently advocating. It was in this context that the EU and China met in Brussels for their sixth bilateral summit some days later.

The *Joint Statement* of the Sixth EU-China Summit was to some extent an acknowledgement of the importance attached by both sides to the bilateral relationship in the documents published during the year: from the European side the *European Security Strategy* and the communication *A maturing partnership* and from the Chinese side the *EU Policy Paper*. According to the document, the EU Communication and the Chinese policy paper promoted 'the development of an overall strategic partnership'. The *Joint Statement* simply reinforced the principles agreed by the parties in the documents elaborated by each side. Even on the turbulent issue of human rights the document seemed to look for an accommodating instance. Instead of accusations and claims for understanding the *Joint Statement* argued that '[the two sides welcomed the achievements of their human rights dialogue and agreed to continue their ongoing dialogue on human rights on the basis of equality and mutual respect'. References to the

possibility of disagreements were replaced by an emphasis on the value attached to bilateral cooperation and even to the fact that the parties, by means of ‘friendly consultation’, were being able to reach agreements on the different topics that composed their vast agenda of cooperation.

#### ***7.1.4 Broadening the Scope of the Relationship while keeping the Framework-rules intact***

Following the framing of the relationship as a ‘strategic partnership’ in 2003, the year 2004 could be characterized by an effort of China and the EU to intensify cooperation and keep strengthening the basis of bilateral relations. 2004 was officially the year of Europe in China, and the parties approved the so-called *Tourism Agreement*. From 13 to 16 April the President of the European Commission Romano Prodi made an official visit to China. The visit was later returned by the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, who paid a visit to the European institutions on 5-6 May as part of his European tour. Before his official visit to China, Romano Prodi pointed to the fact that: ‘our relations are at a historic high point and we have a dynamic partnership in place, full of substantial and constructive action. I am looking forward to seeing the Chinese leadership and to achieving yet further progress on our common agenda.’<sup>120</sup> His declarations were in line with what was said before the visit of Premier Wen some weeks later:

‘EU-China relations have dramatically intensified over the past few decades. China is becoming a more and more global player and, with the new Enlargement, the EU’s influence is assuming new dimensions at home and abroad. In this context, I believe the EU and China have an ever-growing interest in working together as strategic partners to promote sustainable development, peace and stability worldwide and in reinforcing their cooperation across the board.’<sup>121</sup>

These declarations show that the European representatives made an effort to stress the improvements of the previous years in bilateral relations in order to deepen and consolidate the framework of cooperation. Despite the obvious points of disagreement on particular topics of the bilateral agenda, there seemed to be a general common understanding regarding the rules of cooperation and a shared evaluation that the parties were following a positive path. During his visit to Brussels Premier Wen Jiabao delivered an enlightening speech at the China-EU Investment and Trade Forum, which took place on 6 May. In his speech the Chinese leader was very clear in exposing the Chinese understanding of the meaning of ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’:

‘[i]t is a shared view of the two sides to work for a comprehensive strategic partnership. By “comprehensive”, it means that the cooperation should be all-dimensional, wide-ranging and multi-layered. It covers economic, scientific, technological, political and cultural fields, contains both bilateral

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<sup>120</sup> European Commission (2004) *European Commission President Romano Prodi visits China to strengthen bilateral ties* (IP/04/477), Brussels, 7 April 2004.

<sup>121</sup> European Commission (2004). *Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao pays an official visit to the European institutions*, Brussels, 5 May 2004.



and multilateral levels, and is conducted by both governments and non-governmental groups. By “strategic”, it means that the cooperation should be long-term and stable, bearing on the larger picture of China-EU relations. It transcends the differences in ideology and social system and is not subjected to the impacts of individual events that occur from time to time. By “partnership”, it means that the cooperation should be equal-footed, mutually beneficial and win-win. The two sides should base themselves on mutual respect and mutual trust, endeavour to expand converging interests and seek common ground on the major issues while shelving differences on the minor ones.’

This excerpt is extremely important due to the clarity with which Mr. Wen presented his definition of the EU-China ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’. Given how the parties had been developing through their language and understanding of the rules of the relationship, it is not surprising that these were the terms used by the Chinese Prime Minister to frame EU-China relations. In any case it is really important to observe the meaning that Mr. Wen attributed to each word found in the conceptual framework of the relationship. Again the Chinese discourse emphasized the importance of respecting the disagreements associated with different political ideologies and systems. For China this meant the meaning of ‘strategic’. In addition, the use of ‘partnership’ meant that the relationship was non-hierarchical and balanced. The ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ for which China was signing in was a relationship with these characteristics. It was a relationship that, according to Premier Wen in another part of his speech, was ‘a natural development necessitated by the facts of life’. For the Chinese Prime Minister ‘[o]pting for dialogue and resisting confrontation not only reflects the existing maturity of the relationship but ensures its further healthy development in the days ahead’. Interesting is the way in which the Chinese leadership tried to frame this understanding of the ‘strategic partnership’ in this speech since it bordered contradiction. On the one hand a ‘strategic’ relationship was relationship in which disagreements should be taken as acceptable. On the other hand, the possibility of saying that the relationship was being successful was related to the capabilities of the parties to avoid disagreements, or at least to avoid that disagreements turned into confrontation. Therein it can be seen that the ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ that China was advocating was a relationship in which the parties would be having dialogues in many areas, would be intensifying their cooperation – especially in trade – but in which the EU should not even dare to try to criticize Chinese internal and foreign policy practices. It was a relationship in which the EU was entitled not to agree with China as long as its opinions were not publicly exteriorized, because that would be interpreted as sign of confrontation and thus as a posture inadequate to the notion of ‘partnership’, i.e. a relationship between equals.

In this context, it is important to note that Premier Wen Jiabao mentioned in the same speech ‘our friends from the EU’ one has two options. The first option is to have a cynical analytical perspective that argues that the Chinese leader was just paying lip service. The second

option is not to see ‘friendship’ as another fixed category and instead try to comprehend what the Chinese side understood by this notion. In any case, one thing is clear: if these were the terms China was proposing, a ‘strategic partnership’ did not seem to match any (European) common sense understanding of ‘friendship’. This set of rules that China was proposing showed that despite the excitement about the future possibilities of cooperation, there was a long way ahead in terms of developing a relationship based on mutual trust. It showed also that although the cooperation between the parties was being developed in a comprehensive way – at that point there were almost 20 sectoral dialogues and both sides started talking about the conclusion of a new framework agreement by 2005<sup>122</sup> – the potential for crisis in a relationship framed by those rules was extremely high.

Despite the clear terms used by the Chinese leadership to explain its understanding of the basis, expectations and limitations of the relationship, the EU seemed to adopt an accommodating stance and accept this atypical notion of ‘friendship’ proposed by China. In preparation for the seventh bilateral summit that would take place in December in The Hague the language used by the European representatives would focus on the achievements of the recent past. In the press release *EU-China Summit: new steps in a growing relationship*, whose title is by itself already meaningful, it was argued that ‘[t]he Summit will reflect the fact that the EU’s dialogue with China now covers all the essential areas of a modern partnership, from security issues such as nonproliferation and the fight against terror, to trade and economic cooperation, science and technology and the environment, as well as sensitive questions like human rights.’ Therein the EU presented its understanding of a ‘modern partnership’, arguing that it is connected to the breadth of the topics discussed within the bilateral framework. In the press release some declarations of the President of the European Commission, Mr. Barroso, tried to emphasize the relevance of the relationship with China and the importance of the moment for the strengthening of a relationship that was seen by the EU as a foreign policy priority: ‘[w]e are at a dynamic moment in our relationship with China. Our Chinese partners have acknowledged the importance of the EU as a strategic partner and our relationship is growing in the political as well as trade fields. Developing this relationship will be one of our top foreign policy objectives in the years to come.’<sup>123</sup>

It was in this spirit that the parties met in The Hague and expressed in their *Joint Statement* their will to ‘expand and deepen EU-China relations, towards a rapidly maturing

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<sup>122</sup> European Commission (2004) *EU-China Summit: new steps in a growing relationship* (IP/04/1440), Brussels, 6 December 2004.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

comprehensive strategic partnership between the EU and China.’ By seemingly accepting the terms proposed by the Chinese side, the EU demonstrated the existence of a common understanding that the relationship would be on the right track as long as dialogue was maintained and the bilateral summits kept being organized. What is interesting to grasp how both parties understood the notion of ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ was the attention given by the parties to cooperation on security<sup>124</sup> and environmental issues<sup>125</sup>. Moreover, also important was how the parties addressed sensitive issues like the arms embargo: ‘[t]he EU side confirmed its political will to continue to work towards lifting the embargo. The Chinese side welcomed the positive signal, and considered it beneficial to the sound development of the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and the EU.’ The excerpt shows that for the Chinese side a solution for this issue was extremely important for the further development of cooperation within the ‘strategic partnership’ and that the EU was adopting a conciliatory discourse, trying to show its disposition to find a negotiable solution to the problem in spite of the leverage that the issue gave to the EU in the context of the bilateral human rights dialogue. On the other hand, the document also addressed one of the most critical topics for the EU and sensitive for China: human rights. Again, the parties adopted a negotiated and balanced approach to the issue, acknowledging their disagreements but stressing the importance of taking into consideration an agreed framework, by means of which the parties expected to cooperate further on the issue: ‘[t]he Leaders underlined the importance of concrete steps in the field of human rights and reaffirmed their commitment to further enhance co-operation and exchanges in this field on the basis of equality and mutual respect.’

This demonstrates the delicate relationship between the EU and China at this moment. There were clear signs that the relationship was moving forward at a pace perceived as acceptable by both sides. However, the terms of the relationship, which reflected the lack of mutual trust that characterized bilateral relations, limited the capabilities of positioning inside the relationship. The ‘strategic partnership’ was indeed a comprehensive relationship, but the

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<sup>124</sup> ‘The two sides signed the Joint Declaration on Non-proliferation and Arms Control whereby they recognise each other as major strategic partners in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation. Both sides agreed that enhanced co-operation between the EU and China in the non-proliferation area will be conducive to advancing the multilateral non-proliferation process, as well as to expanding and deepening their comprehensive strategic partnership. They identified, in this context, priority areas for co-operation between the two sides.’ Council of the European Union (2004) *7<sup>th</sup> EU-China Summit Joint Statement* (15065/04), Brussels, 8 December 2004.

<sup>125</sup> ‘Technology transfer, exchange of information on methodologies, policy tools and means of implementation as well as staff exchanges and the implementation of projects can all be used to develop a dynamic partnership on environmental issues.’ Council of the European Union (2004) *7<sup>th</sup> EU-China Summit Joint Statement* (15065/04), Brussels, 8 December 2004.

rules of the relationship were a challenge for the constitution of a really ‘mature’ relationship. The agreed idea was that both sides should be satisfied as long as cooperation progressed in some areas like trade and sensitive issues kept being treated as such. In any case, the fact that these terms were recognized by both sides as the clear terms of the relationship had the consequence that the employment of the expression ‘strategic partnership’ was never challenged by an audience the same way it was challenged, for example, in the context of EU-Russia relations. This shows that the way the meaning of the concept has been established in the context of EU-China relations had more legitimacy in comparison to how it had been framed in the context of EU-Russia relations, even though both relationships were extremely challenging.

Despite the many challenges to be tackled by the EU and China in their ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’, momentum was not lost in 2005 and some interesting declarations were made, pushing the limits of accepted practices. In July the President José Manuel Barroso of the European Commission made his first official visit to China. During his visit he commented on the plans regarding the new framework agreement, arguing that it ‘would upgrade our political relations and provide a much stronger basis for our increasingly multi-layered relationship’.<sup>126</sup> However, from an analytical point of view, his most remarkable declarations were related to the necessity of internal change in China: ‘China’s internal long-term sustainability also depends on its ability to introduce political reform, allowing for more democracy and civil liberties.’<sup>127</sup> Mr. Barroso was certainly not saying anything new from a European perspective, but the declaration made in China during his first official visit to the country assumed a different and more assertive tone in comparison to what had been observed in the last couple of years. Mr. Barroso was making an important speech act: he was challenging the ‘strategic’ limits of the relationship, according to the understanding of Premier Wen. He was testing the frontiers of what could be considered an offense that would lead to a confrontation and saying that according to the European understanding of ‘strategic partnership’ EU representatives would keep pointing out and expressing their public dissatisfaction with China’s lack of progress in its human rights policy.

In any case, these declarations did not generate any major changes on how the affairs between the parties were being conducted. In 2005, EU and China signed a memorandum of understanding on labour, employment and social affairs and on the bilateral dialogue on energy

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<sup>126</sup> EU Wants China on Path to Political Reform, *Deutsche Welle*, Beijing, 15 July 2005, <[www.dw.de/eu-wants-china-on-path-to-political-reform/a-1649722](http://www.dw.de/eu-wants-china-on-path-to-political-reform/a-1649722)>, accessed on 20 May 2013.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

and transport strategies. Moreover, they signed a joint statement on cooperation in space exploitation, science and technology development and a joint declaration on climate change.<sup>128</sup> EU and China were indeed expanding their cooperation and succeeding in deepening bilateral cooperation in particular areas, made clear in the *Joint Statement* of the eighth bilateral summit that took place in Beijing on 5 September 2005. Besides the initiatives already mentioned, article 3 of the document pointed out the maritime protocol that extended the existing maritime agreement to new Member States, two financing agreements for the China-EU bio-diversity and river basin programs, and the loan granted by the European Investment Bank for the extension work in the Beijing Airport. Other positive developments were announced in articles 4 and 5: the agreement on a *Joint Declaration on Climate Change*, which according to the *Joint Statement* ‘confirmed the establishment of a China-EU partnership on climate change’ and the already mentioned agreement to start negotiations on a new China-EU Framework Agreement. On other topics on the agenda, like the adherence to the One China Policy, the EU Arms Embargo, cooperation in non-proliferation and disarmament, the language used did not present any changes. That was also the case when the parties mentioned in the document the topic of human rights, highlighting the necessity to deal with these issues ‘on the basis of equality and mutual change’.

In December 2005 the parties held their first EU-China Strategic Dialogue in London and the Chinese government showed its satisfaction with how the bilateral relationship had been developed. In its official webpage the Chinese leadership argued that during the meeting of their Strategic Dialogue ‘[t]he two sides hailed the success of the recent China-EU summit, agreeing to ensure follow-up work is done to push forward their all-round strategic partnership.’<sup>129</sup> The ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ was achieving results. The parties were being able to expand areas of cooperation, the institutional framework of cooperation was also being further developed, and both sides did not seem to have major complaints about their bilateral engagement.

The next year did not bring about major changes to the basic rules of the relationship, but at this time there was an effort to push cooperation further and to materialize a relationship with a growing global impact. References to global issues and the importance of aiming this goal were already present from the beginning of the ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ but

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<sup>128</sup> Information available at the *EU-China Relations: Chronology* published on the site of the European External Action Service: <[http://eeas.europa.eu/china/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/china/index_en.htm)>, accessed on 15 May 2013.

<sup>129</sup> China, EU hold strategic dialogue in London, <<http://www.gov.cn>>, accessed on 20 May 2013.

in 2006 this idea was re-emphasized. Before the ninth bilateral summit, which took place in Helsinki on 9 September 2006, Mr. Barroso stressed that,

‘[t]his year’s EU-China Summit provides an opportunity to consolidate our increasingly broad and fruitful partnership and emphasize our political will to further expand and deepen relations. As two major players on the world stage, we will look at international issues such as non-proliferation in Iran and Korea, development issues, particularly in Africa, climate change, building on our joint declaration last year, and energy security.’<sup>130</sup>

Following the discourse of the President of the Commission, the Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Ms. Benita Ferrero-Waldner stressed the breadth of EU-China relations and the necessity of a new ‘comprehensive agreement’/‘new framework agreement’ to ‘move this extremely important partnership to a higher level’ and ‘help us deepen our strategic partnership and engage more effectively together’<sup>131</sup>. According to the Commission ‘a new strategic vision for a stronger and closer partnership’<sup>132</sup> was needed and this new vision would be presented in the Communication *EU-China: Closer partners, growing responsibilities*.

But before the Communication was disclosed in October, in September both the ninth EU-China Summit and the sixth ASEM summit were held in the Finnish capital. The highlight of the EU-China summit was certainly the announcement of the new *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA)*. According to the summit’s *Joint Statement*, this was an important step ‘[i]n order to reflect the full breadth and depth of today’s comprehensive strategic partnership’. With respect to the ASEM Summit, the speech delivered by Mr. Wen Jiabao with the title *Deepen Asia-Europe Cooperation to Jointly Meet Challenges* is certainly worth mentioning. In his speech, Mr. Wen supported claims for a multilateral world and the leading role of the United Nations. He also advocated for an ‘Asia-Europe partnership of peace, amity and harmony.’ Moreover, Mr. Wen re-emphasized the grounds of Chinese foreign engagement: ‘China’s development of relations with other countries is not based on consideration of ideology or social system, and differences in the modes of development do not affect our cooperation. We are guided by the principle of mutual respect and equality in developing relations with other countries, and we endeavor to develop friendly relations and cooperation with all the other countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence.’

What is really unique about this excerpt by the Chinese government representative is the fact that he again stressed the immutability of Chinese principles of foreign engagement. These principles were presented as fixed and revealed again what the Chinese leadership understood by ‘friendship’ or ‘friendly relations and cooperation’ among nations: a relationship

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<sup>130</sup> European Commission (2006) EU and China to agree on opening negotiations for a new comprehensive framework agreement (IP/06/1161), Brussels, 8 September 2006.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

in which no matter how deep engagement is, ‘mutual respect’ and ‘equality’ must be preserved. At all times the Chinese government stressed to its EU and European counterparts that these were the acceptable rules of the game. China was also willing to establish deeper cooperation, but if the EU and other European countries wanted to develop a long and stable relationship with China, these rules of engagement would have to be followed.

This is important when one observes how the EU responded to this kind of reiterative Chinese discourse in the above mentioned communication *EU-China: Closer partners, growing responsibilities*, launched on 24 October 2006. In the document the European Commission argued that,

‘[t]he EU’s fundamental approach to China must remain one of engagement and partnership. But with a closer strategic partnership, mutual responsibilities increase. The partnership should meet both sides’ interests and the EU and China need to work together as they assume more active and responsible international roles, supporting and contributing to a strong and effective multilateral system. The goal should be a situation where China and the EU can bring their respective strengths to bear to offer joint solutions to global problems’.

The claim for a more active and responsible international engagement is important by itself because it shows that the EU was proposing a different sort of joint-cooperation that could upgrade the impact of the ‘strategic partnership’ on the systemic level. But also worth highlighting was the acknowledgement about the necessity to respect a framework that addressed the needs of both sides for this kind of global engagement to be feasible. A couple of months later, the conclusions of the 2771st Council Meeting General Affairs and External Relations (Council of the European Union) reinforced this understanding of the EU, arguing that,

‘[t]he Council is strongly committed to the maturing of the EU’s comprehensive strategic partnership with China. For this partnership to develop to its full potential, it must be balanced, reciprocal and mutually beneficial. The partnership is increasingly focused on addressing global challenges, and China plays a key role in the effective international response to these issues. The EU and China have important international commitments and responsibilities, and must both work hard to deliver them, in the interest of wider international security and stability and to strengthen an effective, fair, just and rules-based multilateral international system, with the United Nations at its centre’<sup>133</sup>

Hence, the EU did not present a strong resistance to the terms agreed with China. In fact, it reinforced the notion that a ‘maturing’ and ‘comprehensive’ ‘strategic partnership’ between the EU and China ‘must be balanced, reciprocal and mutually beneficial’. Turning back to the communication launched in October, the EU also seemed to reinforce its agreement to the understanding of ‘strategic’ defined by the Chinese counterparts by recognizing problems with value-sharing while saying that the common interests and dialogue would be the

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<sup>133</sup> 2771st Council Meeting General Affairs and External Relations, *EU-China Strategic Partnership - Council Conclusions* (16291/06 – Presse 353), Brussels, 11-12 December 2006.

instruments to overcome these challenges: '[t]he EU and China benefit from globalisation and share common interests in its success. It presents challenges to both and brings further responsibilities. We also share a desire to see an effective multilateral system. But there remain divergences in values, on which dialogue must continue.' Hence, to some extent the European Commission was saying that shared values are an important element in a 'strategic partnership', which makes the EU-China 'strategic partnership' problematic. At the same time, it was also saying that the relationship may heal itself. Through the conduction of a relationship according to the procedures associated with the notion of 'strategic partnership', value-sharing problems could be overcome. Therein one can see the principles and expectations associated with the EU's normative foreign policy in action. The EU showed its adherence to the expectation that the cooperation engagement with China, even according to terms that were not deemed perfect, were the instrument to maybe change the rules of engagement in the future.

Indeed, the 2006 Communication, despite its commitment to the terms of the relationship that had been structured with the Chinese leaders in the previous years, maintained the recurrent EU discourse regarding the role that the EU had in promoting changes in Chinese political and economic systems: '[t]he EU should continue to support for China's internal political and economic reform process, for a strong and stable China which fully respects fundamental rights and freedoms, protects minorities and guarantees the rule of law.' In the Council Conclusions disclosed in December, it could be seen again an emphasis on the issue of human rights:

'[t]he Council reaffirms the high importance the EU attaches to its exchanges with China on human rights, including through the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue. The Council (...) appreciates the commitment made by China to fulfill international human rights obligations and to cooperate with UN human rights mechanisms, in particular the UN Human Rights Council. (...) However, the Council continues to have serious concerns about the human rights situation in China and deeply regrets the fact that there has been little progress in a number of areas'.<sup>134</sup>

Here it is clear that although cooperation was moving forward and the general picture regarding EU-China relations was positive, there was a dispute between the parties. Both recognized the human rights issue as an area of disagreement but there was a clear effort from the Chinese side not to give enough relevance to the issue. For China the principles of 'mutual respect' and 'equality' would allow the parties to cooperate further in spite of this friction. On the other hand, the EU was making an effort not to challenge these principles to some extent imposed by China while not keeping quiet. The EU showed with these also recurrent references to the necessity of improvements in the consolidation of a system of protection of human rights in China, that for the EU this was also an essential fundament of the 'strategic partnership' and

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.



that even if the relationship was non-hierarchical, there was a clear expectation from the EU side, that China needed to fulfill some European expectations.

Yet, relations had reached a stable momentum of growth. At the beginning of 2007 the European Commission launched its *China Strategy Paper 2007-2013*. In the document it was claimed that ‘EU relations with China have developed from a relationship mainly on trade issues to a relationship based on political dialogue and economic, trade and sectoral issues.’ According to the ‘strategy paper’ EU and China constituted a ‘fully fledged partnership’ and the most important issues of the bilateral agenda were ‘the negotiation of the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement, climate change and energy, illegal migration, human rights, Market Economy Status, market access, IPR,<sup>135</sup> and the arms embargo’. Most importantly, representatives from both sides made an effort to sustain the idea that the relationship corresponded to their expectations.

In January 2007, the EU Commissioner for External Relations, Ms. Ferrero Waldner made an official visit to China to launch the negotiations of the new PCA. During her visit she made a speech at Renmin University with the title *EU and China – Moving Forward*.<sup>136</sup> In this speech the European Commissioner explained why, from a European perspective, the EU and China had constituted a ‘comprehensive strategic partnership:

‘[t]he EU and China are comprehensive strategic partners. That is a phrase you may have often heard. But what does it mean in practice? It means a number of things. It includes our strong bilateral co-operation on political issues including international and regional issues, such as climate change and non-proliferation as well as the economy and trade, and co-operation on a huge range of different sectors, from transport, to science and technology, health, culture and education. It also includes our role working together in an international context, co-operation to address today’s global challenges. Our partnership is strong and growing’.

It is important to note that Ms. Ferrero Waldner did not mention ‘values’ in her speech. She did not mention the notion of ‘friendship’ either. She explained the concept of ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ mainly as a pragmatic relationship that extended to a great number of areas of cooperation. According to Ms. Ferrero-Waldner, the growing expansion of the agenda was evidence of a ‘maturing’ partnership.

In this context it is interesting to compare how her Chinese counterpart would frame conceptually the relationship. On 5 December 2007 the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Yang Jiechi, delivered a speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London entitled *Work Together to Build a Common Future*<sup>137</sup> in which he claimed that political cooperation had undergone three stages: ‘from constructive partnership to comprehensive

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<sup>135</sup> Intellectual Property Rights.

<sup>136</sup> Benita Ferrero-Waldner (2007) *EU and China – Moving Forward*. Beijing, 18 January 2007.

<sup>137</sup> Yang Jiechi (2007) *Work Together to Build a Common Future*, London, 5 December 2007.

partnership and then to today's comprehensive strategic partnership'. Mr. Yang stressed the potential for success of the EU-China cooperation was based on five grounds. Firstly, he stressed the fact that 'we do not have conflict of fundamental interests or outstanding historical issues'. Secondly, he argued that 'China and Europe follow similar principles in addressing international issues (...) both advocate multilateralism and support upholding the authority of the United Nations'. Thirdly, he mentioned that 'China and Europe are both in a crucial stage of development and our interests increasingly overlap'. Fourthly, Mr. Yang pointed out that 'China and Europe need to work together to meet global challenges' and that 'cooperation (...) in responding to these challenges not only serves the interests of both sides, but also conduces to international peace, stability and development'. Lastly, the Chinese Minister argued that China and Europe 'are attracted to each other's culture.' It is worth comparing the discourses to see that while the EU representative made references to the achievements of the relationship to justify the notion of 'comprehensive strategic partnership', her Chinese counterpart focused on common interests, values, principles of international engagement and absence of fundamental conflicts of interest as the characteristics of EU-China relations that contribute to the potentially positive future of bilateral cooperation. In any case, most importantly there was a consensual evaluation that the relationship was progressing and that the prognostics regarding the future were optimistic. Moreover, there was a shared understanding that cooperation between the EU and China was also a matter of global responsibilities. This could be found in the speeches of both representatives and was also one of the issues highlighted in the *Joint Statement* of the tenth EU-China Summit, held in Beijing on 28 November 2007. Ms. Ferrero Waldner highlighted in her speech in January that EU and China would face three major challenges to their global relationship in the years to come: tackling weapons proliferation, working closely with African partners to ensure sustainable development, and energy, the environment and climate change. All these challenges have a global dimension.

It is also important to stress that these positive evaluations were not merely diplomatic talk enunciated to omit the real problems and challenges of bilateral cooperation. The parties recognized their differences and challenges. In his speech made in London in the end of 2007, Mr. Yang pointed out the dilemmas and necessary steps to 'elevate China-EU comprehensive strategic partnership to a new high': 'build stronger political mutual trust'; 'upgrade the level of practical cooperation (...) in economy and trade, culture, education, science and technology, environmental protection, finance and other sectors and solidify the material basis' of the bilateral relations; 'promote greater mutual understanding' since '[u]nderstanding is the prerequisite and basis for successful cooperation'; and 'properly manage our differences (...)

step-by-step through dialogue, consultation and cooperation and (...) by respecting each other and treating each other as equals'. To some extent, the recognition of the relationship's dilemmas was one way to reinforce the rules of engagement upon which the parties have been agreeing in the previous years.

### ***7.1.5 Dealing with Crises in a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'***

At the end of 2007, global markets were hit by a major financial crisis whose effects are still felt today. The EU-China 'strategic partnership' was hit by another major crisis though. Despite the existence of a bilateral dialogue on human rights, the Chinese government had been very clear that the country expected the support of the EU regarding its *One China Policy* and related issues like the status of Taiwan and Tibet. As it had been observed previously, the Chinese government demanded that European representatives did not meet the Dalai Lama and restrained themselves with regard to Chinese policy on Tibet.

However, in his visit to China accompanied by a group of European Commissioners, the President of the European Commission, showed his disposition not to fulfill Chinese expectations. In 2008 China was in the spotlight. The Summer Olympics were held in Beijing and the Dalai Lama made use of the fact that China was at the center of the world's attention to campaign against Chinese policy in Tibet. The European public opinion was concerned about human rights violations in the territory and Mr. Barroso pushed the limits of the 'strategic partnership' by speaking about the necessity of dealing with the Tibetan issue. During his meeting with the Chinese Premier, Mr. Wen, Mr. Barroso argued that he was 'particularly encouraged by our open and frank exchanges' and was hoping 'to see positive developments soon.'<sup>138</sup>

The Chinese interpretation of the situation was not that optimistic. According to an interview published by the Chinese state news agency Xinhua with Shen Jiru, researcher at the Chinese Academy of social sciences, the European protests over the situation in Tibet and related protests to the Olympic games were generating a 'fissure' in EU-China relations.<sup>139</sup> In fact, in November after the confirmation that the Dalai Lama would be visiting Europe and would be received by EU representatives and heads of state and government of EU Member States, China cancelled the eleventh EU-China summit one week before its scheduled date. This reaction from the Chinese government was not expected and was not received positively by

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<sup>138</sup> EU's Barroso Encouraged by Tibet Talks with China, *Deutsche Welle*, 25 April 2008, <<http://www.dw.de/eus-barroso-encouraged-by-tibet-talks-with-china/a-3292563%2020.05.2013>>, accessed on 20 May 2013.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

their European counterparts. China's reaction generated the first big crisis in the bilateral relationship and exposed the fragility of the rules on which the relationship was based. For Stanley Crossick, from the think-tank European Policy Centre, the episode was evidence of the 'gulf of misunderstanding between China and the West over the Dalai Lama and Tibet', and for former British diplomat John Fox 'European leaders (...) urgently need to show China that it cannot be divided and bullied and that the current Chinese actions damage both sides' interests.'<sup>140</sup>

The episode was a major set-back in the bilateral relations between the EU and China but it was also an interesting example of how the EU handles crisis with its strategic partners. Recalling the events of August 2008, when the Five Day War generated a significant crisis in EU-Russia relations, the behavior of European representatives in face of the disagreement with China was based on containment and return to normality as soon as possible. In the end of November a new round of the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue took place in Beijing and in 2009 the parties would make an effort to show that the crisis had been overcome. The cancelled summit was rescheduled for May 2009 and, contrary to normal procedures, a second summit would be organized at the end of the same year.

In comparison to the text of the joint statements of previous bilateral summits, the *Joint Press Communiqué* of the eleventh China-EU summit (Prague, 20 May 2009) was much more concise. But the parties were clear that the document should demonstrate that the bilateral relationship had not been affected by the disagreements of the previous year and consequent adjournment of the summit. EU and China representatives expressed that the bilateral relationship was 'now much deeper and stronger, founded on a global, strategic, and mutually beneficial partnership'. In the document, the parties 'restated commitment to pursuing the EU-China comprehensive strategic partnership and their willingness to work together for their mutual development, in forward-looking manner based on the principles of mutual respect, equality, mutual trust, reciprocity and win-win cooperation'.

The *Joint Statement* of the twelfth bilateral summit, which took place in Nanjing on 30 November 2009, followed in the same direction. As if the crisis of 2008 had not happened, the '[l]eaders of both sides applauded the achievements in the development of bilateral relations and expressed satisfaction with the ever maturing and deepening EU-China comprehensive strategic partnership.' The parties did not make any changes in the terms of the 'strategic

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<sup>140</sup> Brussels stunned as Beijing cancels EU-China summit, *EurActiv*, 27 November 2008, <<http://www.euractiv.com/foreign-affairs/brussels-stunned-beijing-cancels-eu-china-summit/article-177550>>, accessed on 20 May 2013.

partnership’ and emphasized that ‘[t]he two sides agreed to stay committed to the strategic nature of the EU-China relationship and pledged to seek greater development of the comprehensive strategic partnership based on mutual respect, equality, mutual benefit, openness and win-win cooperation.’ However some excerpts in the text of the document are worth mentioning. Firstly, there was the argument that ‘both sides agreed that the political mutual trust is enhancing, the pragmatic cooperation in economy, trade and other fields is deepening and expanding’. Therein one should observe with attention the use of the adjective ‘pragmatic’ to define bilateral cooperation. By using this word the parties were drawing on differences about the kind of cooperation they were developing. Cooperation was not being framed in terms of shared values, but in terms of neat objective interests. Secondly, another excerpt stood out, in which the topic of ratification by China of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* was mentioned. The text read: ‘[t]he EU welcomed China’s commitment to ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as soon as possible.’ The issue had been a European demand for years to China but had never been fulfilled. The fact that this subject appeared in the *Joint Statement* shows that despite the fact that the EU tried to stabilize relations with China, it had not changed its posture regarding the treatment by China of the human rights agenda. It seemed that the EU was even acting in a more assertive fashion towards China in the issue. It was not an act of repositioning *per se* but demonstrated an effort of the EU to show the Chinese counterparts that the EU expected some responses from China within the framework of the ‘strategic partnership’.

The tone of the EU-China ‘strategic partnership’, could also be observed in the language used in the context of ASEM summits. This was connected to the interest of European and Chinese leaders to see a spill-over of the rules of their bilateral relations into a broader intercontinental context. At the ASEM Summit, which took place in Hanoi in May 2009, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yang Jiechi, showed once more that for China the rules of EU-China engagement should apply entirely to Europe-Asia relations. In his remarks entitled *Meet Challenges Together As Equal Partners and Write a New Chapter in Asia-Europe Cooperation*, Mr. Yang claimed for ‘a new and closer Asia-Europe partnership’ which aimed to deal with the ‘common difficulties facing Asia and Europe’. However, this supposedly new partnership should be framed by the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs in the exact same terms, for which the Chinese government had been claiming in the last decade:

‘[t]o build such a partnership, we should foster mutual understanding through dialogue on an equal footing. We should be committed to the spirit of treating each other as equals, respecting each other, and expanding common ground while shelving differences. We should understand each other’s social system and cultural background, respect each other’s sovereignty and the right to independently choose social systems and development paths, and enhance mutual trust and friendship through dialogue on an equal

footing, thus jointly creating a favorable political atmosphere for Asia-Europe cooperation. (...) On issues that belong essentially to a country's internal affairs, the international community should fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country concerned, provide active and constructive help, and avoid willfully applying pressure or sanctions'.

The discourse of the Chinese representative aimed at making clear once more that despite the interest in engaging with Europe, cooperation between Asia and Europe would only be possible as long as Europe would respect Asian autonomy and independence to choose its own path and to solve its internal issues without interference from the outside. China insisted on the notions of 'mutual trust', 'equality' and 'friendship'. But as they were presented by the Chinese representatives, these principles and values constituted a relationship that demonstrated lack of confidence and openness for dialogue, besides an extreme lack of flexibility. By framing the relationship in very pragmatic terms, EU and Chinese leaders were developing a relationship that could achieve some results but were limited in their possibilities to overcome mistrust and strengthen the notion of 'friendship' in a more Western understanding of the term.

#### ***7.1.6 A New Starting Point for the '(Comprehensive) Strategic Partnership'?***

As it has already been argued, the EU-China 'comprehensive strategic partnership', despite its limitations in terms of shared values, was not the object of as much criticism by the public opinion as the EU-Russia 'strategic partnership'. However, like in the EU-Russia relationship, the parties showed the constant necessity to reiterate what they perceived to be the adequate understanding of the rules that guided the relationship. In a joint press statement in the context of an official visit from the president of the European Commission, Mr. Durao Barroso, and of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Lady Catherine Ashton, to China in the end of April 2010, China's Prime Minister Wen Jiabao used a metaphor to explain once more the Chinese understanding of a 'strategic partnership': '[n]o matter how the international landscape may evolve, China and the EU should always join hands and forge ahead like passengers in the same boat.'

In fact, in a context of an enduring financial crisis, EU and China representatives demonstrated an interest in forgetting the 2008 bilateral crisis and in pushing their cooperation further. Some months after the visit in April/May, Catherine Ashton returned to China to participate in the first EU-China High Level Partnership Dialogue. In her speech, the High Representative of the EU for FASP stressed that '[t]he EU and China face common challenges and share similar goals. I look forward to working together with State Councillor Dai Bingguo in order to advance a constructive and cooperative relationship with China -- a key strategic

partner for Europe in a globalised world'.<sup>141</sup> The order of the day was to highlight what had been achieved to that point and stress the differentiated character of the relationship between the EU and China in comparison to others. The EU's *People's Republic of China: Mid-Term Review National Indicative Programme 2011-2013* pointed out, for example the existence of 56 dialogues and working groups within the institutional framework of EU-China relations: ten dialogues dealing with political issues, ten dealing with trade, and thirty-six on 'external dimensions of internal policies'. According to the understanding mentioned previously in this chapter, EU-China relations were 'comprehensive' indeed.

Despite this institutional comprehensiveness and consensus about a relationship based on mutual understanding and equality, the EU did not miss its opportunities to address the European audience and claim that it was not giving up on its goals of promoting change in China. In the leaflet *Closer partners, growing responsibilities*, published by the Delegation of the European Union in October 2010, the 'main goals of EU policy towards China' were presented as: '[b]roaden and deepen dialogue with China, both bilaterally and on the world stage', '[s]upport China's opening-up process and its transition to a society based on the rule of law and respect for human rights', '[e]ncourage China's ongoing integration in the global economy and trading system, while supporting the economic and social reform process', and '[r]aise the EU's profile in China to enhance mutual understanding'. Hence, although the EU could not be accused of not advocating a deeper relationship and the strengthening of mutual understanding, it displayed a different posture with respect to the promotion of a balanced and non-hierarchical relationship. Whereas on the one hand the EU constantly argued that it agreed with the principle of equality in the 'strategic partnership', it also consistently claimed to its European audience that it did not forget its goals of implementing normative change in China. A pragmatic discourse enunciated in official meetings with Chinese representatives was contrasted by other documents in which the EU exposed the priorities of its engagement with China. That also helps to explain the obsession of the Chinese leadership with the constant reiteration of the basic principles on which the relationship was based.

In the *Joint Press Communiqué* of the thirteenth EU-China Summit, which was held on 6 October 2010, the parties recalled the spirit of their 'comprehensive strategic partnership': 'equality, reciprocity and mutual benefit'. They also argued that 'relations should stand at a new starting point for further development at a time when the impacts of the current financial crisis on the international economic, political and security landscape are becoming increasingly

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<sup>141</sup> European Commission (2010) *EU High Representative/Commission Vice-President Catherine Ashton visits China for first "Partnership" Dialogue* (IP/10/1077), Brussels, 30 August 2010.

evident, and the EU and China are both entering a new important stage of development.’ Despite these references to a new beginning in the relationship, officially there was no intention to promote major changes in the *modus operandi* of the bilateral cooperation. In the absence of major confrontations between the two parties, EU and Chinese leaders remained faithful to a framework perceived as successful to the extent that it allowed their cooperation to move forward. During the bilateral summit the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, mimicking similar enunciations made to characterize the relationships with Russia and Brazil, argued that ‘[t]he EU and China have a strategic partnership of utmost importance’ and explained his understanding of why EU and China have a ‘true partnership’: ‘[a]s in a true partnership, we have commonalities, but at the same time also differences in our approach. This is to be expected and should not impede our joint will to bring our relationship to a higher level. To the contrary, they should stimulate our discussion.’ Again, one sees the often observed claim that it is completely normal to observe differences between strategic partners and both EU and Chinese leaders seemed to agree on that. And as it could be observed in the relationship with Russia, Mr. Van Rompuy constantly tried to sustain the assertive speech act of characterizing a country as a ‘strategic partner’. The European representative’s goal in all of the EU strategic partners was to try to convince the audience that disagreements between strategic partners were not a sign of a failing ‘strategic partnership’ but indeed an expected characteristic that defined these frameworks of engagement between international political actors.

Echoing this rationale, Tang Jiaxuan, former Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs published an article on 24 May 2011 entitled *The Prosperous and Promising Cooperation between Asia and Europe*. The article addressed more specifically the type of cooperation that should be developed on the level of ASEM relations, but as usual, it reflected the terms that China was willing to consolidate in the context of EU-China relations. The former Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs argued that ‘[a]s two major forces of the multi-polar world, Asia and Europe continue to respect each other and seek common ground while shelving differences. They are striving to enhance understanding and expand common ground through equal dialogue.’<sup>142</sup> Whereas this assertive speech-act concerning the nature of EU cooperation with China was openly accepted by EU representatives, Mr. Tang’s claim that ‘[t]here is no conflict of fundamental interests between Asia and Europe and they share identical or similar views on a series of major international issues, which has laid a firm foundation for extensive and in-

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<sup>142</sup> Tang Jiaxuan (2011) *The Prosperous and Promising Cooperation between Asia and Europe*, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China* (website), 24 May 2011, accessed on 15 May 2013.



depth Asian-European cooperation of equality and friendship'<sup>143</sup> was not accepted by the European audience. Mr. Tang argued additionally that 'as long as the two parties concerned can abide by the principle of equality, friendship, mutual accommodation and mutual benefit, differences will not necessarily become obstacles, and on the contrary, may even become the driving force and content of dialogue, cooperation and exchange.' He highlighted that 'Asia-Europe cooperation is pragmatic and effective' and that the 'spirit of pragmatism' was to seek 'common ground while reserving differences'.<sup>144</sup> Hence, the Chinese leadership wanted a pragmatic relationship from the EU. And the idea of 'pragmatism' advocated by Chinese leaders corresponded to the presence of the adjective 'strategic' to characterize the 'partnership'. As Wen Jiabao addressed the meaning of 'comprehensive strategic partnership' in his speech at the China-EU Investment and Trade Forum on 6 May 2004, this understanding of the EU-China relations as 'strategic'/'pragmatic' showed that the presence of shared values was not as fundamental as a common understanding that the necessity to sustain a cooperative dynamic was based on fixed principles that put both sides on the same hierarchical level.

EU representatives recognized the necessity to sustain a relationship between equals but whereas for China the relationship seemed to be following the right path, the EU wanted more from its 'strategic partnership' with China. In May 2011 the President of the European Council, Mr. Herman van Rompuy, made an official visit to China. In his speech with the title *Europe and China in an interdependent world*, held at the Central Party School in Beijing on 17 May 2011, he emphasized the priority that China had in the EU's foreign policy. Mr. van Rompuy stressed that his 'visit to China [was] the first official bilateral visit of the permanent President of the European Council outside Europe.' He also argued that his visit was the expression of a wish 'to develop a reliable, constructive and forward looking strategic partnership with China, fully aware of our convergences and divergences.' Most interestingly, Mr. Van Rompuy also argued in favor of a change in the rules of the relationship:

'[t]he story of our relationship should not be seen as a competition, as if we were sportsmen in a match; no, the way our societies and economies interact has the potential to transform the game we are playing.'

In this excerpt it should be observed that Mr. van Rompuy mentions his desire to see EU-China relations developing into a new 'game', a relationship which is not seen as a competition. That shows that he, as a European representative, saw EU-China relations as a relationship that was taken by some observers as a competitive relationship. With his assertions, he was indirectly arguing that he did not agree with those who claimed that the relationship was

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

a successful cooperation between friends. The EU and China did not see themselves as enemies, but to argue that the parties constituted a relationship of ‘friendship’ ignored the strong bilateral mistrust that helped to frame a relationship based on notions of rivalry and competition. Mr. Van Rompuy’s speech showed that the EU leadership was sincere in its desire to develop a more friendly relationship with China, but that it did not agree with Chinese declarations that the relationship was successful and that equality would be the sufficient condition to the achievement of shared goals. He argued that it was ‘crucial to have a dialogue in friendship and trust’, using a language that was compatible with that used by the Chinese leaders, but by saying that ‘we should build our partnership on the principles of shared responsibility, cooperation and openness’ he proposed a new framework for the ‘strategic partnership’, in which China would abdicate of a discourse so worried with the protection of its autonomy and open itself to the possibilities of change in its approach regarding domestic and international issues. Mr. van Rompuy was not denying the principles of ‘equality’ and ‘mutual advantage’ but was certainly attacking the emphasis that the Chinese government was putting on the supposedly ‘pragmatic’ nature of the relationship, because such emphasis was perceived by the EU as an obstacle to the development of a non-competitive relationship based on ‘trust’ and ‘friendship’.

It can thus be seen that in the beginning of this decade, EU and China start to drift apart slightly with regard to the principles that frame the bilateral relationship. Whereas China was arguing for the maintenance of the agreed terms of the relationship, the EU was in favor of a change in the recognized guiding principles of EU-China bilateral cooperation.

However, these declarations from the president of the European Council did not gain political momentum immediately and soon the older and usual language of ‘equality’, ‘mutual trust’ and ‘mutual benefit’ would regain its position in the bilateral discourse on the fundamentals of the ‘strategic partnership’. In the third article of the *Joint Press Communiqué* of the fourteenth EU-China summit, held in Beijing on 14 February 2012, once again emphasis was put on the fact that ‘[t]he two sides agreed that China and the EU share broad common interests, and where differences remain these should be discussed and handled in a spirit of mutual respect and equality. Both sides recognized the importance of accommodating each other’s concerns for furthering the overall relationship taking a strategic perspective.’ The parties also stressed in article 5 of the document the importance of ‘mutual trust’ for their ‘strategic partnership’: ‘[b]oth sides agreed that deepening understanding and mutual trust between the two peoples was vital to the sustained and stable development of EU-China relations.’ These and other references to the essential character of ‘mutual trust’ show that the relevance of ‘shared values’ or of matching concepts of ‘friendship’ is actually related to how these elements affect the

possibility of supporting a trust-based relationship. The existence or not of a gap of values or the internalization of perceptions of ‘enmity’, ‘rivalry’ and ‘friendship’ are important within the ‘strategic partnership’ to the extent that they influence the capacity of the parties to develop a minimum degree of mutual trust.

What really remained from van Rompuy’s 2011 declaration was a new posturing of the European representatives to stress the necessity of improved results from bilateral cooperation. In his statement at the summit, van Rompuy argued that ‘I believe we are not yet fully reaping the fruit of our bilateral economic and trade relationship.’ Moreover, Mr. Barroso, pointed out that the relationship ‘is indeed a strategic partnership that goes beyond the very important dimension of trade and investment.’ The president of the European Commission also reiterated the common emphasis on the clear common understanding of the nature of the relationship and its rules by claiming that ‘[o]ur partnership is one of the most important in the world today’ and stressing the ‘strategic perspective’ about the EU-China ‘strategic partnership’: ‘[t]his is the right perspective, the strategic perspective. There are some differences, we know that, but there is a common interest that is above these differences.’ Thus European representatives supported the basic rules of the relationship, but were arguing in favor of a relationship that should not be merely based on a notion of ‘pragmatism’, but that extend beyond trade and investment and that had the potential to generate more gains to both sides. Following this reasoning, Mr. Barroso would argue before the fifteenth summit, which took place on 20 September 2012,<sup>145</sup> that ‘EU China cooperation is indispensable in today’s world, as shown by the increasing number of global issues on our common agenda – from economic matters and trade to climate change and sustainable development. Our growing interdependence should contribute to bringing about more opportunities for citizens and for business.’<sup>146</sup>

During the summit, the last Wen Jiabao would attend as the head of the Chinese delegation, the European leadership stressed the importance of mutual understanding for EU-China relations. In his opening remarks at the summit, the President of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy, claimed that ‘[w]e have reached a level of mutual understanding and respect that provides a very solid base to strengthen further our partnership and to address also the differences that exist between the EU and China.’<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Since there was no bilateral summit in 2011, EU and China organized two summits in 2012.

<sup>146</sup> European Council The President (2012) *15th EU-China Summit: joining forces in challenging times* (EUCO 170/12, PRESSE 386, PR PCE 145), Brussels, 19 September 2012.

<sup>147</sup> European Council The President (2012) *Opening remarks by President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy at the 15th EU-China Summit* (EUCO 171/12, PRESSE 387, PR PCE 146), Brussels, 20 September 2012.

However, some declarations and actions from the Chinese side demonstrated that it was not as satisfied with the results of the ‘strategic partnership’ as the European representatives were trying to convince its audience and that the parties still had a long road ahead in terms of developing mutual understanding. In his last speech at EU-China summit and evaluating the results of ten years of bilateral cooperation, Premier Wen Jiabao declared that,

‘China and the EU are two major strategic forces in the world, we don’t have conflicts of major interests, we regard each other’s development as an opportunity, not a threat. Closer cooperation serves the fundamental interest of both sides. We need to jointly think about the shaping of a new international landscape and become comprehensive strategic partners of each other in a true sense. Finally I have to be very frank in saying this: on the two issues of lifting the arms embargo against China and recognizing China’s full market economy status we have been working hard for 10 years but the solution has been elusive. I deeply regret this.’<sup>148</sup>

These two subjects were still as problematic for China as human rights-related topics were sensitive for the European Union. It is important to mention that there was more to Wen Jiabao’s speech. The Chinese Prime Minister continued to say that ‘I hope, and I do believe that the EU side will seize the opportunity and take greater initiative at an early stage and remove’ when suddenly the audio and images broadcasted of the meeting were cut off at the request of the Chinese delegation.<sup>149</sup> Chinese representatives were not willing to publicly show their dissatisfaction with the European Union. This episode showed that despite an apparent ‘successful cooperation’, both parties were expecting more results from the ‘strategic partnership’. It should be here stressed that in the press statement made by Mr. Van Rompuy and Mr. Barroso after the summit, ‘successful cooperation’ was defined as meaning ‘moving forward regularly and engaging on all the issues that matter’. In that sense the EU-China ‘strategic partnership’ was indeed successful because there were in fact comprehensive dialogues being held on all imaginable issues of bilateral concern, but in terms of practical achievements on sensitive issues, the parties were lagging behind expectations.<sup>150</sup>

At this point some interesting positioning conducted by both sides through language are worth pointing out. On the Chinese side, the speech of the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, Song Tao, made in October 2012 and entitled *A Better Future for China-Europe Relations*.<sup>151</sup> In his speech, the Chinese representative tried to show that Chinese engagement

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<sup>148</sup> Simultaneous translation of Wen Jiabao’s speech at the 15th EU-China Summit. Video available at <[www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-19657940](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-19657940)>, accessed 21 May 2013.

<sup>149</sup> Melvin, Don (Associated Press) (2012) *EU-China summit opens with emphasis on trade*. Brussels, 20 September 2012.

<sup>150</sup> European Council The President (2012) *Press Statement by President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy and President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso following the 15th EU-China Summit* (EUCO 172/12, PRESSE 389, PR PCE 147), Brussels, 20 September 2012.

<sup>151</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (2012) *A Better Future for China-Europe Relations 30 October 2012*, <[www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/zyjh/t985383.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/zyjh/t985383.shtml)>, accessed 10 October 2013.

with the EU was based on the notions of ‘friendship’ and ‘loyalty’ and that in a moment of European debility, the EU-China ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ was a mechanism that allowed China to support a fragile EU in a moment of crisis:

‘China has provided firm support to Europe since the outbreak of the debt crisis. We contributed USD 43 billion to the IMF, and provided assistance to Europe within our capabilities through purchasing European treasury bonds and increasing imports from Europe. In my view, this is what we should do as the EU’s comprehensive strategic partner. (...) When the European debt crisis was at its worst, some people in the world, including those from Europe, propagated the ideas of the “Euro collapse” and “EU’s disintegration”. Yet China has never changed its view toward Europe, and remained confident about the future of European integration. As Premier Wen Jiabao said, “China is EU’s trusted friend and cooperation partner”’.

Interestingly, in his speech Mr. Song tried to portray the idea of China as a friend in a different way. Therein ‘friendship’ was presented as a relationship in which one of the parties, worried with the current situation of its friend, made an effort, probably even in detriment of his more objective interests, to assist the other. In this sense, Mr. Song made reference to a notion of ‘friendship’ that is different from the concept of ‘friendship’ that had been advocated by Chinese leaders up to that point. It was certainly a portrayal of ‘friendship’ more accessible to a European audience. However, it should be also stressed that by presenting the relationship between the EU in China in such terms, Mr. Song also managed to reposition the internal hierarchy of the bilateral relationship: the EU was presented as the fragile party in need of the assistance of an economic stronger Chinese party.

But the EU would also make a very important act of repositioning. In December 2012 the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs disclosed a *Report on EU-China relations Motion for a European Parliament Resolution*.<sup>152</sup> In this document, the Committee on Foreign Affairs made very stark criticism to internal affairs of China. For example, the report criticized the fact that,

‘despite the Chinese Government’s progress in promoting some economic and social rights, the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, press freedom and the right to join a trade union is persistently repressed; whereas human rights organisations continue to report serious human rights abuses by the Chinese authorities, including the sentencing of high-profile dissidents such as imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo, expanded restrictions on media and internet freedom, tightened surveillance and harassment of lawyers, human rights defenders and nongovernmental organisations, broadened control and oppression of Uighurs, Tibetans and their freedoms, and increasing numbers of enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions, including in secret, unlawful detention facilities known as ‘black jails’; whereas repressive policies against Tibetans’ basic freedoms have triggered a worrying number of self-immolations in recent years’.

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<sup>152</sup> European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs (Rapporteur: Bastiaan Belder) (2012) *Report on EU-China relations Motion for a European Parliament Resolution* [2012/2137(INI)], 20 December 2012.

The reported touched upon this and other much sensitive issues, which the European Parliamentarians knew were taken by the Chinese government as issues of exclusive competence of the Chinese authorities. In a very bold approach, the Members of the European Parliament even argued that despite a welcoming successful economic policy, they ‘share[d] the criticism made by independent Chinese scholars and observers that the preservation of this trend is seriously threatened by corruption scandals, a lack of transparency and a “red aristocracy” of close family members of former and present party leaders who possess enormous fortunes owing to their political and economic connections, a grave situation which was recently laid bare by the Bo Xilai affair.’ On China’s foreign policy, it was argued, for example, that China should assume a more responsible behavior in the international arena by:

‘[u]rg[ing] the PRC to use its global position in a more responsible way, in particular in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), where it holds a permanent seat and a right of veto; stresses, in this connection, the need for China to abandon its veto position on any UNSC resolution allowing intervention in Syria in order to halt the civil war and to enable the Syrian people to take the future of their country into their hands, as part of a democratic and free process; stresses that China should also act in a responsible manner that is commensurate with its global contribution, at G20 level to deal with the world financial crisis, by aligning itself with World Trade Organisation rules, and by observing all international conventions and treaties to which it is a party’.

But even more important than the defiance of the rule advocated by China that bilateral relations should be based on ‘mutual respect’, the European Parliamentarians proposed very defiant new terms for the EU-China ‘strategic partnership’, advocating that:

‘the Strategic Partnership between the EU and China includes freedom of the media on a reciprocal basis, which implies press freedom for the Chinese media in Europe and also press freedom for European media in China; expects all the European institutions strongly to advocate this fundamental human rights principle in their contacts with their respective Chinese partners’.

It seems that the Members of the European Parliament were in consonance with Mr. van Rompuy’s speech in 2011. The new decade would slowly bring a European approach to the ‘strategic partnership’ with China that saw the necessity of change. The European Parliament was against a more balanced and diplomatic discourse and was eager to see a different ‘strategic partnership’. It certainly saw the EU in a position to demand a more engaged Chinese government in accordance to some values considered fundamental for the Western audience.

In fact, the EU’s ‘acting as if’ a new EU-China ‘strategic partnership’ were possible would start to gain more momentum at this moment. Naturally, the Chinese government was not in favor of a total reformulation of the terms of engagement, but little by little a consensus started to be established around the idea that some problems were much evident and that there was a need for a renewed cooperation. In April 2013 the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Song Tao delivered a speech with the title *Build a New Type of China-Europe Partnership Featuring*

*Mutual Respect, Mutual Learning, Comprehensive Cooperation and Common Prosperity*.<sup>153</sup> In this speech, Mr. Song tried to highlight the assumption that the relationship between China and the EU is not one of rivalry: ‘[m]ore and more people on both sides have come to see that China and Europe are cooperation partners rather than competitors, and China-Europe cooperation is a mutually beneficial endeavor rather than a zero-sum game’. The Chinese representative not only echoed the claims in favor of a renewed relationship, but also pointed out that the element of ‘shared values’ was an essential challenge that had to be overcome for a successful bilateral cooperation between the parties:

‘[t]o establish this new type of partnership, China and Europe need to rise above two hurdles. First, we need to rise above the differences in ideology and social system and cooperate with each other in the spirit of mutual respect and seeking common ground while shelving differences. Second, we need to rise above the “zero-sum” mentality in big power rivalry of the past, and pursue common development by way of mutual accommodation, open and fair competition and win-win cooperation. (...) I believe that such a new type of partnership between China and Europe featuring mutual respect, mutual learning, comprehensive cooperation and common prosperity will set an example of international relations of the 21st century and make fresh contribution to the noble cause of world peace and development.’

In addition, Mr. Song stressed that overcoming this challenge regarding different systems of thought was related to the element of ‘trust’: ‘[w]e need to boost strategic mutual trust. Without trust, there is no foundation for cooperation’. Hence, it can be seen that the parties were aware of the challenges ahead. They acknowledged that their ‘strategic partnership’ had to evolve and after having reached this agreed understanding of the next steps ahead they would be able to proceed with implementation. Before the sixteenth EU-China summit, which took place in Beijing on 21 November 2013, the President of the European Council stressed the necessity of being more ambitious: ‘[w]e are celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership”. Our relation has matured. We have developed greater confidence and trust and we should consider seriously how to build on this and increase our level of ambition’.<sup>154</sup> At the press conference of the summit, the President of the European Commission, Mr. Barroso, reiterated the Chinese discourse and focused on the element of ‘strategic trust’,

‘[s]o, we have built a solid Strategic Partnership, we have launched the basis for this Strategic Cooperation for the next decade and I believe beyond. All this is consolidating a sentiment of strategic trust. Trust is something that needs to be nurtured and deserved on both sides. That comes from regular

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<sup>153</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (Song Tao, Vice Foreign Minister) (2013) Build a New Type of China-Europe Partnership Featuring Mutual Respect, Mutual Learning, Comprehensive Cooperation and Common Prosperity, IES Ambassadors' Forum of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 3 April 2013.

<sup>154</sup> European Council The President (2013) Opening remarks by President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy at the 16th EU-China summit (EUCO 240/13, PRESSE 494, PR PCE 215), Beijing, 21 November 2013.

contacts and dialogue. I am grateful for the opportunity we had today to consolidate and expand that trust, for the benefit of our peoples and the world at large'.<sup>155</sup>

Here Mr. Barroso mentioned the agreements reached during the summit. The parties not only launched a High Level Dialogue on Innovation Cooperation and announced the launching of negotiations for an investment agreement; these measures were the first within the framework of the *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation*. With this document EU and China did not change the basic principles of their 'strategic partnership'. In the document the parties agreed to 'continue to consolidate and develop their strategic partnership to the benefit of both sides, based on the principles of equality, respect and trust. The EU reaffirms its respect for China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. China reaffirms its support to EU integration.' In terms of proceedings, there were not any major changes either. The *2020 Agenda* stressed the role of the annual summit, 'which provides strategic guidance to their relationship' and listed the 'three pillars' on which the summit was sustained; 'the annual High Level Strategic Dialogue, the annual High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue, and the bi-annual People-to-People Dialogue'. Along with the summit and the pillars, the document presented the 'regular meetings of counterparts and (...) their broad range of sectoral dialogues' as instruments for the implementation of the *Strategic Agenda for Cooperation*.

This re-inauguration of the 'comprehensive strategic partnership' shows that in terms of meaning there were not any major changes to the parties' understanding of the principles and fundamentals of their cooperation. However, by analyzing the process through which the elaboration of the *2020 Agenda* came into being, it is clear that through a dialogical process of exchange the parties entered a dynamic of re-evaluation of their relationship. It also became evident that due to a lack of mutual trust the parties had not been able to develop their 'strategic partnership' according to the principles agreed by both sides. One of the parties then recognized the need and claimed for a reformulation of the terms of the relationship. The other side, without agreeing on a total change in the meaning of the 'comprehensive strategic partnership', acknowledged the necessity to solve the problems, re-launch the relationship and look for possible new instruments to further develop cooperation according to a mutually beneficial framework. In this sense, the 2010s did not necessarily bring a new understanding to the 'comprehensive strategic partnership' but inaugurated a new phase in the bilateral relationship between EU and China, a phase in which the parties more openly recognize the challenges they face in terms of developing trust and renew their commitment to shared goals.

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<sup>155</sup> European Commission (José Manuel Durao Barroso) (2013) *Statement by President Barroso at the press conference of the EU-China Summit* (SPEECH/13/959), Beijing, 21 November 2013.



## 7.2 Challenges of a ‘Comprehensive Strategic Partnership’

The EU-China ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’, like the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’, suffers from a very basic problem of trust building. If one takes into consideration the issue of legitimacy, the EU-China relationship is not actually as criticized as the EU-Russia relationship. To some extent, for the European audience it is clearer that the engagement with China is essential and that it brings a clear return to EU Member States. There is no question that the EU and China have a ‘strategic partnership’. Nevertheless, the parties are faced with a real challenge in finding a compromise on how to achieve particular individual goals. Although they share common goals, EU and China have their own agendas, demonstrating that the ‘gap of values’ has important consequences for the capacity of these strategic partners to develop their cooperation further.

Dialogue is essentially always desirable but it is a fact that the EU-China Dialogue on Human Rights was established in 1995, and despite almost twenty years of bilateral meetings the parties have not been able to find a common agreement in this area. It is understandable that the European representatives show their dissatisfaction with such a scenario. However, it is not a matter of finding a guilty party. It would be a biased reading of the facts to say that the Chinese leadership is the one side to blame on this issue. The fact is that the parties, through bilateral dialogue, were not able to succeed in reducing the gap of values. According to Mattlin (2010, p. 10), ‘[b]etween the EU and China, many political values are not shared, apart from the very abstract level.’ And the analysis of the speeches from the Chinese leaders shows that some abstract concepts like ‘friendship’ are understood differently by Chinese and European audiences. There have been some recent initial movements in which the parties have been trying to accommodate their shared understanding on some particular principles and challenges, but this has been a slow process which may or may not generate some results in the future.

Holslag (2011, p. 310) claims that the EU is hardly considered a strategic actor by the Chinese leadership. Without overlooking the complexity of Chinese foreign policy due to the lack of centralization and existence of many actors that are actively involved in its making (Fisi, 2011, p. 79), Holslag’s claims are exaggerated. One cannot certainly ignore that China’s foreign policy to the EU cannot be dissociated from the relationships with the US, Russia and other actors, but the relationship with the EU is a channel for China to pursue an agenda with clear fundamental goals, and to that extent the Chinese leadership is aware of the relevance of the relationship with the EU. In turn, as it also happens in the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’,

despite the commitment of the parties with the notion of ‘multilateralism’, the strategic partners manifests a different understanding of this supposedly shared principle. Holslag (2011, p. 306) claims that,

‘[t]he interaction between China and Europe in the context of the UN confirms two different interpretations of ‘effective multilateralism’. Both parties confirm that the UN should be harnessed for addressing new challenges in a more efficient way. Both parties have also recognized the importance of the UN Security Council in curbing destabilizing unilateralism. Yet while the EU’s expectation is to turn bodies like the UN into channels for exerting normative power, China considers them to be theatres for discussing international norms on an equal footing. China’s alleged compliance with multilateral frameworks is rather a matter of recognizing them as a useful platform to discuss the rules of the game and to deflect western criticism. China’s posture in the UN Human Rights Council and the UN Security Council proves that the “democratization of international relations” to which Beijing aspires means in reality that the majority of developing countries should be able to protect their interests against the minority of developed countries. In the Security Council, China once more remains focused on the US as its main opponent, and on Russia as its main ally’.

The picture drawn by Holslag (2011) oversimplifies the interaction among China, the EU, the US and Russia, but the analysis of language conducted so far in this chapter indicates that some of his arguments apply to some extent. One should not characterize the EU-China ‘strategic partnership’ as a mere arena in which China struggles to have recognized its status as an equal among the most important actors in the system and in which the EU tries to act normatively to have an influence on how China develops into a democratic state and incorporate some Western values into its external action. That is not the single side of an extremely complex relationship, but it is indeed a defining element within the dynamics of this bilateral relationship. In addition, the author makes an important point when he stresses that the different understandings of ‘effective multilateralism’ present itself as a challenge in allowing the parties to overcome many controversial instances of their cooperation as strategic partners.

According to Mattlin (2010, p. 6) when faced with the options of implementing either a rights-based offensive approach or value-based defensive approach, the EU should choose the latter. For him the former ‘does not work in the case of China’ (Mattlin, 2010, p. 8). Holslag (2011) maintains that the EU’s current normative approach does not seem to be working either. The author criticizes ‘Europe’s stubborn belief that it can socialize China. (...) This convergence is not taking place. Yet the contrary is true. China more assertively defends the idea that it has the right to adhere to its own principles in conceiving its future policies’ (2011, p. 309). It is not the goal of this chapter to discuss if the EU’s strategy towards China is successful or not and if it should be changed. What is importance to note is that other analysts of EU-China relations present the element of gap of values and the adoption of a normative foreign policy by the EU as a major challenge for the further development of this relationship. And as it could be observed in how the parties have been trying to frame their bilateral

understanding of the concept of '(comprehensive) strategic partnership', this dilemma has been translated into the choice made by the parties on how to propose the basic framework of their relationship. The recognition of the existing dilemmas and challenges in terms of values, principles and world views between the EU and China has led the parties from a very initial phase to stress their common understanding that their 'comprehensive strategic partnership' was a relationship between equals, in which disagreements were acceptable and even expected, and in which none of the parties should achieve its particular goals in detriment of the other. That was on the one hand very positive because it allowed the parties to establish the foundations of a relationship that has been growing in scope. On the other hand it has been a major dilemma – mainly for the EU – in terms of framing a relationship which was from the beginning much open to changes and in this sense also had a limited potential to move into a deeper cooperation. The emphasis the parties still put on the necessity of building mutual trust shows that this is and will remain a challenge for the years to come.

However, that does not mean that relationship is a failure. It is not evidence that the EU's normative approach to China is mistaken either. Recent declarations and repositionings in the last years show that both the EU and Chinese leadership are aware that some improvements and even some changes are necessary for the relationship to keep progressing in a positive direction for both sides. It is and it will not be an easy process, but through the language of 'strategic partnership' that parties have established a solid framework to cooperate in practical issues and develop an institutionally consolidated political dialogue. In this process they have also had the opportunity to improve mutual understanding. It is thus an expected outcome that this socialization process may have an influence in the further developments of the 'comprehensive strategic partnership'. It will probably not happen exactly as it is planned by European strategists, but it does not mean first that the EU cannot advance a normative agenda upon China through the 'comprehensive strategic partnership' framework and second that maybe this is the best option they have to approach this very challenging partner.

### **7.3 EU-China: An Ideal Type 'of Strategic Partnership'?**

This chapter showed that the EU-China 'strategic partnership' differentiates itself distinctively from other EU 'strategic partnerships'. In this section I summarize the phases of this relationship and draw some conclusions about what this relationship can tell us about the uses of 'strategic partnership' made by the EU.

A first phase in EU-China relations can be demarcated, which starts in 1975 and extends for many years until the establishment of the ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ in 2003. It is a long period of time that can certainly be subdivided into many sub-phases, but which for analytical purposes can be seen as a single phase that prepared the parties to the subsequent phase in which the relationship was constituted as a ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’. What is important about this initial period of engagement between the European Union and the People’s Republic of China is that at this moment some basic principles of cooperation still valid within the framework of the ‘strategic partnership’ have been agreed upon. Hence, ‘equality’ and ‘mutual advantage’ were defined as the main guiding principles of bilateral cooperation. At this moment it emerged also the common understanding that a ‘partnership’ is a relationship in which the partners, when faced with challenges, have to deal with them in a non-confrontational manner. Moreover, according to a further agreed understanding of ‘comprehensive partnership’ in this phase, the existence of disagreements between partners should not be taken as the configuration of crisis situations as long as the parties remained committed to a balanced position and to the search of a common and mutually beneficial solution. In this initial phase the EU did not refrain from showing its dissatisfaction with the human rights situation in China and with the protectionist economic policies advanced by Beijing. The EU also had a slightly predominant role in the agenda setting of the bilateral dialogue. However, it was a relationship that already showed a commitment to the idea of ‘equality’.

In 2003 China and the EU established their ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ and initiated a new period in their bilateral relationship that extended more or less to the beginning of the next decade. In this new phase, the EU recognized China as one of its major strategic partners and although a European discourse about the EU’s special role in the relationship was not completely absent, both parties recognized the necessity to stress that the relationship was based on equality and on clear common and mutually beneficial interests. As Premier Wen presented in his 2004 speech, the ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ was an all-dimensional, multi-layered, long-term and stable relationship. It was on equal footing and mutually beneficial cooperation, which transcended differences in ideology and social systems. Despite the EU’s interests in promoting its values in China, what emerged from the consensus between the parties was the notion that the relationship should be based on principles of pragmatism. Common values were not the fundament of cooperation; the consolidation of values like democracy, free market and rule of law in China were not a joint goal. Even though the parties remained committed to the understanding that disagreements were a mere reality in a ‘strategic

partnership' between equals, EU-China relations experienced the tension between the absence of an internal hierarchy in the relationship and the efforts to conciliate the individual and shared interests of the parties. In this context, it could be observed in many moments the effort made by the Chinese leadership to stress and reinforce the agreed rules of the 'comprehensive strategic partnership': 'mutual respect', 'mutual trust', 'reciprocity', 'equality', 'complementarity'.

This second phase of the relationship shows how different the EU-China relations are in comparison to other relationships in which the EU takes part and are framed under the concept of 'strategic partnership'. It is a relationship that stands out both for the high level of mutual respect and low level of mutual trust. This formula led to a relationship in which the rules of engagement were not often and openly challenged. There were certainly many signalizations on the European side that China should improve its human rights records for example. There were also some intents of repositioning like Mr. Barroso's declarations during his visit to China in 2005 in which he challenged the 'strategic' limits of the relationship by claiming for political reform to allow for more democracy and civil liberties. In its essence, it was a period in which whereas the EU accepted the rules starkly defended by the Chinese side, it did not keep quiet and manifested its dissatisfaction and sometimes even challenged China's behavior. It was a period in which the EU-China institutional framework of cooperation developed enormously but in which different understandings about values and other concepts, like 'friendship', presented themselves as major challenges in the promotion of mutual trust. In any case, essentially what stands out is the stable character of the relationship in this period and the small number of acts of repositioning.

Finally, there is the third phase that started with Mr. van Rompuy's visit to China in May 2011. At that occasion the president of the European Council argued for the development of the relationship towards a non-confrontational game, a new framework in which EU and China based their behavior towards each other on the principles of 'shared responsibility', 'cooperation' and 'openness'. That was the 'friendship'-based relationship that the EU wanted to construct with China, which did not exclude the important principle of 'equality' but prevented its use as a mere excuse not to negotiate changes in concrete policies. It was the beginning of a phase in which the EU, despite its internal dilemmas associated with the economic crisis, presented itself as a more assertive actor. The European Parliament also became an ever stronger voice, making stark criticisms against the never negotiable chronic issues on the agenda and advocating change in the 'strategic partnership'. What makes this period a new phase in the relationship is the fact that the Chinese leadership slowly seemed to

agree with the European interpretation that some changes to the relationship were necessary. Chinese political leaders did not buy the ‘new package’ proposed by the EU entirely but showed their agreement with the need to move beyond a zero-sum mentality and work for the development of a partnership based on ‘mutual respect’, ‘mutual learning’, ‘comprehensive cooperation’, and ‘common prosperity’ capable of boosting ‘strategic mutual trust’. This was an interesting turn of events. It shows that through outspoken exchange of their opinions the parties were able to re-evaluate and re-launch their relationship. They recognized openly the challenges they face in terms of developing trust, renewed their commitment to achieving shared goals, and proposed a slightly different framework to try to succeed in this joint endeavor. Here I call attention to the element of ‘mutual learning’ proposed by the Chinese. This move was not a major reformulation of the rules of the game. It is also not sure how and if it will condition the behavior of the parties along the negotiation of the sensitive issues that are currently blocked in their bilateral agenda. But it shows that a new language is emerging between these ‘comprehensive strategic partners’. To some degree, the parties are slowly learning to understand better how each other conceive of some particular concepts, like that of ‘friendship’.

One important aspect of the EU-China ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ is that even the critics of the relationship do not put into question that the relationship is a ‘strategic partnership’. If one compares this case with the Russian case, it is clear how the discussion is influenced by political discourses related to a particular common ground and perceptions of the other and of the rules of the game, which condition the capacity of the assertive speech act ‘we are strategic partners’ to be successfully accepted by a particular audience. Gaps of values are certainly relevant in any relationship but especially to the extent to which they affect perceptions of trust. For many reasons like the assertiveness of the Russian foreign policy discourse, a Cold War past and the recent crises involving the EU and Russia, mutual trust happens to be much lower in the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’ than in the EU-China ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’. That affects the capacity of EU and Russia to sustain the idea that they in fact hold a strategic relationship. That does not happen in the Chinese case even if one could argue that the gap of values is actually much wider.

Does that mean that the EU-China relationship is an ideal type of ‘strategic partnership’ for the EU? The answer is not as simple as it might appear. After analyzing three EU ‘strategic partnerships’ it seems clear that there is no single strategy that applies to all cases. Each relationship is framed in a different way and faces a particular set of challenges. But to some extent it could be said that the utilization of ‘strategic partnership’ by the EU in its relationship

with China has allowed the European Union to achieve a significant degree of success within this particular bilateral framework. If one defines success in this case as the ability to gain access to a market and development a balanced political advantage with another international political actor, that indeed has been taking place between the EU and China. In addition, despite the undeniable gap of values translated into an equality-based relationship which is characterized by many disagreements, 'comprehensive strategic partnership' was a language accepted by the Chinese side to frame the bilateral relations with the EU and conduct a relationship that has been growing in interdependence and complexity. It is too soon to say if the EU through this framework is generating a process of socialization and exchange capable of advancing its normative goals in China. Some many more years and a much significant change in practices will have to be observed before it can be said that the 'pragmatic move' was successful, but slowly some elements of change in the bilateral discourse can be perceived. The parties at least speak of the necessity of change. And if speaking equals acting, the EU and China have already started to act as if a different relationship were possible. If one takes into consideration what has been achieved in terms of dialogue in the last ten years it could even be said that the empirical results are already visible.

## 8 The India-EU ‘Strategic Partnership’

The relationship between the European Union and India stands out for presenting some common characteristics with the other ‘strategic partnerships’ discussed thus far, while at same time having a *sui generis* nature that sets it apart from these other relationships in many aspects. On the one hand, it is a relationship that is strongly justified by trade and economic interests. India is not as a relevant trade partner for the EU, like China and Russia, but the EU cannot ignore its attractive huge internal market and growing economy. On the other hand, the EU-India relationship demonstrates a strong commitment in terms of shared values. Culturally speaking India is not as close to Europe as Brazil, for example, but the agreement on a common political rhetoric regarding democracy and human rights makes India a fundamental partner of the EU in its goal to promote Western political values. There are other common views and interests that certainly push bilateral cooperation forward but also some disagreements that limit the capacity of the parties to deepen their joint collaboration in key-areas. It is a relationship whose ‘strategic partnership’ label is not systematically questioned but due to a more balanced dynamics regarding expectations, challenges and results, does not attract as much attention from the political elites on both sides as the relationship with other ‘strategic partners’ (Khandekar, 2013; Jain, 2014).

In any case it is a relationship with a long history of cooperation. In 1962 diplomatic relations were established between India and the European Economic Community. And although it would take around twenty years for India and the EU to initiate a formal political dialogue, on 17 December 1973 the first agreement between India and the European Communities was signed. In 23 June 1981 the parties decided on an agreement for commercial and economic cooperation. These agreements paved the way for the future steps that would be taken in the 1990s and 2000s, including the establishment of the EU-India ‘strategic partnership’.

This chapter discusses the kind of relationship developed by India and the European Union in the last decades. It examines the context in which ‘strategic partnership’ is used as a conceptual framework for this relationship. Following the methodology used in the previous chapters, bilateral framework documents and speeches from Indian and EU representatives will be analyzed to elaborate on how this ‘strategic partnership’ has been framed and how, through the introduction of this expression in the vocabulary of EU-India relations, a particular form of interaction has been developed with a particular set of rules which defines the agenda of the relationship, the internal dynamics between the two parties, and the foundation of their



collaboration in terms of references to shared values and notions of rivalry and friendship. The analysis will start with the framework agreements adopted in December 1993 and will end with the twelfth EU-India summit, which took place on 10 February 2012. I show that the development of the ‘meaning’ of ‘strategic partnership’ in the case of EU-India relations is very particular and constitutes a relationship that shares communalities with some of the other EU ‘strategic partnerships’ but ultimately presents a logic of its own.

## 8.1 Framing an India-EU ‘Strategic Partnership’

### 8.1.1 First Steps towards Closer Cooperation

In 1982, political relations between India and the European Communities were intensified by the establishment of Troika ministerial meetings<sup>156</sup> but it would be only in 1993 that more important steps would be taken to agree on a more substantial framework to conduct bilateral cooperation. In November 1993 the Maastricht Treaty established the European Union. Interestingly, already on 20 December 1993 Indian and EU representatives agreed on a *EU-India Joint Statement on Political Dialogue* and signed a *Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development*, which would be adopted in 1994. This shows the consensus between the parties about the importance of intensifying bilateral cooperation. In addition, it demonstrates that both sides were eager to deepen their collaborative relationship.

The *EU-India Joint Statement on Political Dialogue* was subdivided into two parts. The first part was a *Joint Press Release*<sup>157</sup> and the second part the *European Union-India Political Statement*<sup>158</sup> itself. The latter summarized the motivation and framework of engagement that was established in detail by the *Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development*. Concerning the former, some interesting elements can be pointed out, like article 19, which stated that ‘[t]he Parties have agreed to hold friendly consultations in the fields covered by the Agreement if any problem arises in the intervals between the meetings of the Joint Commission’. The *European Union-India Political Statement*, stressed that ‘the parties reaffirm their commitment to a political dialogue contributing to the establishment of lasting links of solidarity and new forms of cooperation.’ Thus the parties were employing some interesting

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<sup>156</sup> Commission of the European Communities (1996). *Communication from the Commission: EU-India Enhanced Partnership* [COM(96) 275 final], Brussels, 26 June 1996.

<sup>157</sup> European Commission and Government of India (1993) *Joint Press Release* [11390/93 (Presse 246)], Brussels, 20 December 1993.

<sup>158</sup> European Commission and Government of India (1993) *European Union - India Political Statement*, Brussels, 20 December 1993.

elements in the common language of their bilateral relationship, which emphasized notions of friendship, peaceful resolution of conflicts and the development of links of solidarity. This would be complemented by a framework of political dialogue centered on common values and goals found also at the *European Union-India Political Statement*, which argued that,

‘[t]he Political Dialogue, based on shared values and aspirations, will aim to :

- Underline the parties' common attachment to democracy and respect for human rights, and their common commitment to safeguarding peace and establishing a just and stable international order in accordance with the UN charter,
- Reinforce the parties' common interest in closer cooperation to promote prosperity, the commitment to economic reforms and liberalisation of the economy, free trade and the enhancement of economic stability, social progress and the development of cultural ties,
- Enable each party to consider the position and interests of the other party in their respective decision-making processes,
- Bring about mutual understanding, increase cooperation and work towards defining areas of agreement on international issues, particularly those of concern like non-proliferation and disarmament, combating terrorism, drug trafficking and money laundering, and other matters relating to peace and international stability.’

Most of the elements found in this quote would later be emphasized in other documents and joint statements to frame the relationship between the EU and India. But what is striking in this excerpt is not only the establishment of common goals and the reference to common values, but the definition of an internal dynamics between the parties, according to which each side must take the interests of the other party into consideration and make an effort to promote ‘mutual understanding’.

These joint resolutions would be highlighted by the *Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development*, which has a central role because it presents a set of terms for the EU-India relationship that would become a reference for future cooperation between the parties. The document defined the status of the interaction between the European Union and India as a ‘partnership’, which was based on ‘excellent relations and traditional links of friendship’. According to the text of the agreement, these links should be stressed and the partnership should be enhanced. Moreover, already at this initial moment, the parties agreed that the relationship was to be conducted ‘on the basis of equality, non-discrimination and mutual benefit’. Despite the great asymmetry between India and the EU in terms of global power projection capabilities, from its beginning it was a relationship based on very balanced terms of engagement. This was also very evident when one looks into article 1 of the agreement, which pointed out its basis and objectives:

‘1. Respect for human rights and democratic principles is the basis for the cooperation between the Contracting Parties and for the provisions of this Agreement, and it constitutes an essential element of the Agreement.

2. The principal objective of this Agreement is to enhance and develop, through dialogue and partnership, the various aspects of cooperation between the Contracting Parties in order to achieve a closer and upgraded relationship.

This cooperation will focus in particular on:

- further development and diversification of trade and investment in their mutual interest, taking into account their respective economic situations;
- facilitation of better mutual understanding and strengthening of ties between the two regions in respect of technical, economic and cultural matters;
- building up of India's economic capability to interact more effectively with the Community;
- acceleration of the pace of India's economic development, supporting India's efforts in building up its economic capabilities, by way of provision of resources and technical assistance by the Community within the framework of its cooperation policies and regulations, in particular to improve the living conditions of the poorer sections of the population;
- development in their mutual interest of existing and new forms of economic cooperation directed at promoting and facilitating exchanges and connections between their business communities, taking into account the implementation of Indian economic reforms and opportunities for the creation of a suitable environment for investment;
- support of environmental protection and sustainable management of natural resources.

3. The Contracting Parties acknowledge the value in the light of the objectives of this Agreement of consulting each other on international, economic and commercial issues of mutual interest.'

This is a long excerpt but it says much about the terms agreed upon by the parties for their 'partnership'. The first aspect that should be highlighted is the importance given to shared values – particularly 'human rights' and 'democratic principles' as the foundation of joint cooperation. Whereas this is an extremely sensitive issue in the relationships between the EU and Russia and between the EU and China, the EU and India already presented it as consensus at the beginning of their bilateral cooperation. Furthermore, when one looks at the goals of the relationship, even when some of them acknowledge the necessity that India catches up on some of its deficiencies, the language used is very careful, presenting a much lighter directive character than in the 1994 *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement* between the EU and Russia, for example. The text certainly positioned India as a party that should take some steps towards further development of its economy but it did not necessarily describe a relationship of 'teaching', in which the EU would guide its partner in its way forward. The text was elaborated in a way that it stressed the fact that the parties aimed to put in practice a relationship of joint collaboration. This can be also observed in the third paragraph of the article, which stressed the importance of consultation on topics of mutual interest.

Two years after adopting this cooperation agreement the European Commission disclosed in June 1996 the communication *EU-India Enhanced Partnership*. As the title of the document indicates, the European Commission's proposal was to establish an 'enhanced partnership' and the document focused on 'intensifying the political dialogue', 'trade and

investment facilitation’ and ‘helping India face structural adjustment’. The communication followed the same orientation of the previous agreement and exposed the EU’s interest to intensify the partnership with India by ‘working through the priorities’ agreed by the parties and ‘increasing cultural understanding’. One of the most important aspects of this document was the emphasis put on the shared values and interests between the EU and India:

‘[i]ndeed, on many points, notably those of an international political nature, the EU and India have a shared interest in tackling the challenges together, as both must face the same issues, and the growth of inter-dependency means that neither can ignore the choices made by the other. The scope for increased growth through trade and investment also presents an opportunity for each side, and requires assiduous work in tackling obstacles, and promoting awareness of the possibilities available. Furthermore, the shared values of India and Europe, vitality of cultures, and need for greater mutual understanding, create opportunities for cross-learning, imposing an important human dimension on relations. In all these ways, the challenges which are of joint interest can become tremendous opportunities for joint benefit.’

The EU recognized in the document that not everything in this relationship was perfect. It mentioned the challenges and the necessity ‘for greater mutual understandings’. But it also showed optimism by stressing the expectation that on the basis of common values the parties would find a way towards deeper cooperation which in the long term would create a degree of inter-dependency that would make impossible for the parties to ignore each other. According to this argument, the shared values were no automatic guarantee that the parties would succeed in achieving their goals, but were seen as the basis on which a strengthened relationship could flourish. That would pave the way for a very balanced interaction in which the parties would have no other alternative than work together. This showed the presence of a very liberal logic in the relationship sustained by the mutual perception that shared values would lead to deeper shared interests.

Despite the political declaration and cooperation agreements in 1994, and a clear perception from both sides that an enhanced partnership was desired, it would take the parties some years to take further steps and raise the level of their bilateral engagement. In Lisbon on 28 June 2000 this is what happened when India and the EU organized their first summit. There they agreed on a *Joint Declaration* and an *Agenda for Action*. It was the first time the parties declared they were establishing a ‘strategic partnership’ and the fundamentals of this new format were presented in the joint declaration:

‘[o]n this historic occasion, we resolve that in the 21st century the EU and India shall build a new strategic partnership founded on shared values and aspirations characterised by enhanced and multi-faceted co-operation.

We, based on the shared universal values of democracy and the respect for human rights, rule of law and fundamental freedoms, stress our commitment to promote socio-economic development and prosperity, as well as international peace, stability and security. We also derive strength from our traditions of diversity, plurality and tolerance.

We are convinced that the process of economic reform and liberalisation in India leading to enhanced and sustained growth on the one hand, and gradual integration and enlargement of the EU on the other, provide us with an excellent opportunity to launch a new phase of constructive and mutually beneficial partnership.

We reaffirm our commitment to the strengthening and deepening of our consultations and enhancing our co-ordination on bilateral, regional and multilateral issues of common concern.’

This quote reveals the foundation of a renewed cooperation between the EU and India, which was basically the same as the 1994 cooperation agreement. In a new international context the only new aspect mentioned by the parties is the necessity to promote ‘international peace, stability and security’. Again a great emphasis was placed on the values shared by the parties: democracy, human rights and multilateralism. These elements were highlighted in the text as the necessary basis for an agreement on common interests and joint action:

‘1. We believe that the EU and India must rise to the occasion to work together towards a world in which the aspirations of our people can be fulfilled. To this end, we re-affirm our commitment to democracy, the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as the promotion of peace, stability and security, and the encouragement of socio-economic development and prosperity.

2. Based on our common shared values we recognize the need to build a coalition of interests in order to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The EU and India are important partners in the shaping of the emerging multipolar world.

3. It is in this context that we resolve to enhance our political dialogue, to promote mutual understanding and to improve co-ordination.’

In fact, the parties did more than simply reiterate their commitment to the same values they had previously defended. The parties managed to renew their previous commitments and extend them even further, thus showing a level of engagement that at this point was much more developed than the relations held with China and Russia, for example. It must be stressed that the EU and India reached an agreement in which they not merely based their relationship on equality and recognized the possibility of strategic partners to have disagreements, but they also made clear their commitment to a multilateral framework for conflict resolution. As strategic partners, India and the EU ‘reaffirmed their strong commitment to the settlement of disputes by peaceful means, in accordance with international law, bilateral agreements and the principles of the United Nations Charter. In this context, both sides agree[ed] to pursue regular contacts, within the framework of the political dialogue, to address security issues of common concern’.

The great emphasis on security cooperation also sets this relationship apart from the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’, for example. In their first joint statement India and the EU stressed the importance of counter-terrorism in their common agenda: ‘[w]e will strengthen our co-operation in preventing and combating terrorism, guided by the principles of international law and relevant UN Conventions. We will bolster joint efforts to counter terrorism and meet all other challenges arising from it both in the regional and international context. We agree

therefore to strive for a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.’ Furthermore, the parties also committed themselves to the goal of eradication of chemical and biological weapons and, more surprisingly, to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. Considering the fact that India is a country with nuclear military power and that the joint statement was disclosed just two years after the Indian and Pakistani nuclear bomb tests, it was remarkable that India was committing itself to this goal in the context of the ‘strategic partnership’ with the EU.

Another topic in the agenda stressed by both parties was the centrality of the protection of human rights in their ‘strategic partnership’. Article 6 of the joint statement declared that, ‘[w]e emphasise the importance of co-ordinating efforts to promote and protect human rights. In this respect, we reaffirm the need to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms, taking into account their universal, interdependent and indivisible character, as confirmed by our commitment to the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights’. This demonstrates how close India and the EU were in terms of shared values. It also shows the breadth of a ‘strategic partnership’ that since the beginning was established with the goal to address an economic, military and development agenda. In this context, it is not difficult to understand how important the first EU-India summit was for the relationship between these two international political actors. At that moment only Canada, Japan, Russia and the US were holding regular bilateral summits with the EU. Moreover, by receiving the status of ‘strategic partner’, India certainly was legitimized as a first league global player. According to the European Commission, the first bilateral summit between the EU and India was ‘the single most important milestone in enhancing EU-India relations to date’<sup>159</sup> and made India ‘to be recognized as a truly global player’.<sup>160</sup> Indeed, the gathering took the relationship to a whole different level and certainly was perceived by New Delhi and by the international community as the recognition that India was reaching a higher status in the international society.

### ***8.1.2 More ‘Ups’ than ‘Downs’ and First Positioning in a Relationship in Pursuit of Maturity***

When EU and Indian representatives met in New Delhi on 23 November 2001, they mostly confirmed their satisfaction with the goals achieved up to that point. But of more interest than

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<sup>159</sup> European Commission, *A Milestone in EU India Relations*, June 2000.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

the *Joint Communiqué* of the political summit were the speeches given by European representatives and the signing of the *Agreement for Scientific Cooperation*.

The day of the summit the newspaper *Times of India* published an article of the President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, with the title *Heal the World – EU and India have a moral duty*. It is important to point to the title of this article since it was a very strong statement from Mr. Prodi in the sense that it argued that the EU and India had a moral obligation to solve the problems of the world. In this text he underscored the importance of trade and investment in the agenda of the relationship as well as the development aid given from the EU to India. But he also stated that the ‘strategic partnership’ was much broader and deeper. Mr. Prodi emphasized the political nature of the ‘strategic partnership’ and the expectations of the EU regarding cooperation with India ‘to promote stability and democracy around the globe’. For him India was ‘a key partner in this process and the natural cornerstone of the EU’s relationship with South Asia’. Furthermore, he pointed out the moral duty of the strategic partners in combating international terrorism and promoting ‘respect for human dignity’. Later that day in a speech at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Romano Prodi would insist on these claims. His speech had a bold title: ‘Drawing the world together’. In this occasion Mr. Prodi claimed that India and the EU ‘must strive to offer a model of integration, to spread an attitude of openness and tolerance and to promote the values we share, particularly the inviolability of human dignity, values clearly proclaimed in the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights. This is our moral duty.’ He also insisted that in dealing with terrorism they should honor the victims of violence and ‘help draw the world closer together.’

In the speeches of the president of the European Commission and also of the Commissioner for Trade, Pascal Lamy, the effort of the European Commission to position the EU and India as a normative relationship based on shared values was not limited to individual and bilateral interests. It was presented as a relationship with a potential and obligation to have a systemic impact. It is remarkable how strongly the EU was promoting the idea that India was an essential global player in the twenty-first century. The political authorities in New Delhi were certainly satisfied to have such an acknowledgement from the EU representatives.

The ‘strategic partnership’ between the EU and India was a win-win situation. On the one hand India was a country of great territorial dimensions, huge population, booming economic growth and a nuclear power with whom the EU shared some fundamental values and who was willing to support the political rhetoric of the EU’s structural foreign policy. On the other hand, India was being promoted to the big league of global players and offered a relationship with its most important trade partner in very balanced terms. That could also be

seen in the text of the *Agreement for Scientific Cooperation*. Article 3 presented the principles of the agreement: ‘(a) mutual benefit based on an overall balance of advantages; (b) reciprocal access to the activities of research and technological development undertaken by each Party; (c) timely exchange of information which may affect cooperative activities; (d) appropriate protection of intellectual property rights.’ All the instances of bilateral engagement emphasized notions of equality, reciprocity and mutual benefit. For both parties the deal was actually very satisfactory.

In September 2002 the EU launched its *Country Strategy Paper India 2002-2006*. The document addressed many dimensions of the EU-India relationship but it focused mostly on development cooperation between the parties. In fact, the document stressed that ‘[t]he overall objective of EC co-operation with India is to support the official policy aimed at reducing poverty by half within the decade, with particular emphasis on social and economic reform, improved governance and sustainable development.’ In that context, the Commission assumed a more prominent positioning in this document as the party that could and should assist India in its development policies: ‘[t]he EU, being India’s largest trading partner and most important source of foreign investment has a special responsibility to assist India tackling the “second generation” of economic reforms.’ In another part of the strategy paper again the verb ‘to assist’ was employed to describe the role that the EU could play in its relationship with India. It was argued that the European Commission’s cooperation strategy

‘will assist India to build its “human capital” by dedicating its resources to

- making elementary education universal
- improving health services in favour of the hitherto deprived population groups
- restoring and safeguarding a healthy environment

The EC will work with the Indian authorities to create an enabling economic environment. It will share its expertise, including in science and technology, to help India unlock the full potential of its economy, induce better returns on its vast economic assets through regulatory reform, privatisation and fiscal reform. It will also seek to facilitate the exchange of talented students, scholars and the collaboration of scientists from both sides.’

The language used clearly presented India as a country in need of assistance and the EU as a partner that could provide the necessary financial and technical resources to allow India to achieve its goals. However, this positioning was not as aggressive as the one observed in the language of the EU-Russia relationship, for example. It was a more subtle positioning that did not intend to establish a hierarchy between the partners. It was a document elaborated to frame EU-India development cooperation and in fact put the EU in the position of providing assistance but not in a way to promote changes in the political system or to really implement a normative



intervention in this country. Therein, like in all the EU's 'country strategy papers', the EU was putting itself at the service of a country for the achievement of development-related goals.

Indeed the Indian authorities did not seem to be bothered by any alleged attempt by the EU to change the balance of the internal hierarchy of the relationship. In an interview with the *Financial Times* published on 7 October 2002, the Indian Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee would argue that '[o]n the whole, our relations are poised to expand and develop on the basis of several existing positive trends in our relationship.' Nevertheless, despite a positive optimism regarding the possible future outcomes of the 'strategic partnership', the Indian Prime Minister felt comfortable enough to present his disagreement with the EU posture on trade of goods and services:

'[t]here are a number of priority items for which we seek better access in EU markets. Clothing and garments from India are being discriminated against through some unfair provisions in the European GSP scheme. Indian agricultural products like basmati rice, sugar, dairy products, mushroom, gherkin, floriculture products and marine products also seem to be facing some non-tariff barriers as well as some restrictions from some quota/tariff regulations of EC. The implementation of these regulations needs to be carefully examined vis-à-vis their impact on developing countries. Non harmonization of EU health-related regulations has at times created difficulties for marine product exports from India. We believe that the European Union should show the same commitment to free mobility of professional skills as it has for free movement of goods and services. Our entrepreneurs, especially in IT and other growth sectors would benefit from better access to the EU through simplified visa and work permit regimes.'

This excerpt is important because it shows that the Indian government had a long list of complaints regarding EU regulations and accessibility. Yet these complaints did not translate into a major crisis. That was the understanding of the parties regarding the framework of their 'strategic partnership': there would be the necessity of negotiations in many areas, but the expectation was that through dialogue the parties would be able to find a middle ground. And the same posturing could be observed on the European side. During the third EU-India business summit held in Copenhagen on 9 October 2002, the European Commissioner for Enterprise and the Information Society Erkki Liikanen claimed that, '[w]e share with India the same ambition to develop a long-term partnership: we want to improve the business environment, to facilitate free trade, services and investment flows between our regions'.<sup>161</sup> But in another intervention during the summit he also openly criticized his Indian counterparts: 'poor regulation and insufficient clarity and legal certainty are affecting the operations of a range of European-based multinational companies operating in India. In addition, we believe that insufficient regulation in this sector is a significant factor hampering India's development, not only because it will inhibit investment by European companies, but also because communications services are not

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161 Liikanen, Erkki (2002) India-EU business relations – challenges and opportunities, Copenhagen, 9 October 2002.

being extended to low-income sectors of society as quickly as they could be'.<sup>162</sup> Despite the criticisms the European Commissioner emphasized that through cooperation these issues in the area of trade and investment could be solved and an optimal solution for both India and the EU could be achieved:

'[o]ur collaboration is mutually beneficial, not only on account of India's size as a potential future market, and its importance in the EU's overall external relations. But also with a view to providing the opportunity for the Indian authorities to use European models for regulatory frameworks, and to evaluate European experiences in markets and technology.

In order to avoid obstacles to investment, in this crucial sector, further follow-up is needed in the context of the so-called "Joint Initiative on Trade and Investment". The Commission is pleased to share European regulatory experiences with the Indian authorities in the joint working group planned for November.'

In this quote the European representative indeed presented a situation in which the relationship was similar to one of mentoring, in which the EU would share its experience with the Indian authorities to improve Indian regulation in accordance to European legislation. In spite of this more complicated dialogue in trade and investment, the parties would not take it as an element that would put the notion of 'strategic partnership' in jeopardy.

In fact, the 'strategic partnership' would remain in good terms and soon bear more fruits through the implementation of agreements in specific areas of cooperation. In New Delhi on 29 November 2003, Indian and EU representatives met again at the Fourth EU-India Summit and announced their satisfaction with the conclusion of a customs cooperation agreement, of advanced negotiations for the participation of India in the satellite project *Galileo* and the launch of negotiations for a maritime agreement. In this context, the parties praised their agreed terms of cooperation in the summit's *Joint Press Statement*, claiming to 'remain determined to develop this relationship further on the basis of equality and mutual benefit'. In addition to emphasizing these two fundamental principles of their 'strategic partnership', Indian and EU representatives stressed their commitment to the values of democracy and pluralism and their will to promote these values all over the world: '[w]e are willing to work together to promote pluralistic democracy in the world by laying special emphasis on democratic principles and practice.' This time the parties also highlighted their commitment to human rights and even elaborated on the rights they were making reference to. They also explained their strategy for the diffusion of these rights:

'[w]e affirmed that democracy provides a crucial safeguard for protection and promotion of Human Rights. All Human Rights including the right to personal, economic, social and cultural development are universal, indivisible, interdependent and inter-related. We believe in the equal importance of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and are committed to their full realization. International co-operation needs to be harnessed for the protection and promotion of human rights through dialogue

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<sup>162</sup> Liikanen, Erkki (2002b) India-EU: Trade and Investment Strategies, Copenhagen, 9 October 2002.

and mutual understanding in a comprehensive global framework. We affirmed our willingness to discuss Human Rights in a comprehensive manner.’

Stressing their goal to look ‘beyond the well-established trade and economic agenda’ the joint statement emphasized the breadth of areas for joint cooperation and gave prominence to topics like counter-terrorism. On this issue, the strategic partners advocated in favor of the adoption of a *Comprehensive Cooperation on International Terrorism* and the international commitment to counter-terrorism measures compatible with ‘universally accepted Human Rights standards and norms’.

In the agenda for action annexed to the joint statement the parties presented their action plan to achieve the joint goals agreed so far. The language found in the document is noteworthy because it serves as evidence of a framework of cooperation that claims to be attached to principles of equality and mutual benefit. Therein the parties argued that they would ‘[e]nsure in depth discussions’, ‘[d]iscuss Democracy and Human Rights in a comprehensive manner’, ‘[i]ntensify cooperation’, ‘[i]ncrease cooperation’, ‘[p]romote exchanges’, ‘[t]ake steps to facilitate’. All these expressions show the commitment to a relationship fundamentally based on political dialogue – a strategy that fulfilled its expectations since the parties claimed that they ‘enjoy a mature relationship’.<sup>163</sup>

### ***8.1.3 Bringing the Relationship to the Next Level: the Construction of a ‘Truly’ Strategic Partnership between ‘Mature’ ‘Natural Partners’***

As the *Annual Report 2004-2005* launched by the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs would argue, 2004 was a ‘watershed’ year for India, the EU, and for their ‘strategic partnership’. In India, a new government lead by Manmohan Singh took office. The EU experienced the most important phase of its enlargement process with the accession of ten new Member States from Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. In addition, after the disclosure of the *European Security Strategy* in the previous year, it was time to give an impulse to the strengthening and deepening of the EU-India ‘strategic partnership’. In this context, two documents had a very special role in the re-launch of the relationship: the communication of the European Commission titled *An EU-India Strategic Partnership*<sup>164</sup> and the official response

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<sup>163</sup> It is interesting to note the use of the adjective ‘mature’ in this context to refer to the EU-India ‘strategic partnership’. Two months before this summit the EC Communication *A maturing partnership* was disclosed to address the relationship between the EU and China. In both cases this notion of ‘maturity’ was employed to address the relationships with the strategic partners.

<sup>164</sup> Commission of the European Communities (2004) *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee: An EU India Strategic Partnership* [COM(2004) 430 final], Brussels, 16 June 2004.

to this document from the Indian government.<sup>165</sup> It is important to call attention to the fact that although the EU and India had already been defining their relationship as a ‘strategic partnership’ since their first bilateral summit in June 2000, most of the documents which will be disclosed after 2004 will take the fifth summit organized in November 2004 as the ‘formal’ beginning of the ‘strategic partnership’. In the monograph *The European Union and India: a strategic partnership for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*<sup>166</sup> published by the European Commission in July 2006, it would be argued that the fifth summit ‘formally agreed of an EU-India strategic partnership’ which was ‘then made concrete by the sixth summit in New Delhi in September 2005, which adopted a joint action plan that translate[d] this into operational initiatives’.

In the communication *An EU-India Strategic Partnership* the European Commission presented an India that was ‘changing, dramatically and fast’, whose democratic structures were ‘healthier and more vibrant than ever’, and that was experiencing ‘great progress in foreign and domestic policy issues’. The document stressed the ‘close relationship, based on shared values and mutual respect’ between the EU and India, but claimed for changes. According to the communication:

‘[a] new strategy should be guided by the following objectives: to promote peace, stability, democracy, human rights, the rule of law and good governance, *inter alia* by fighting terrorism and illicit trafficking; to co-operate on fighting poverty, inequality and social exclusion, and on sustainable development, environment protection, and climate change; and to enhance economic interaction and secure a strengthened international economic order.’

In fact, the document did not really reformulate the basis of the cooperative engagement between India and the EU, but it stressed the relevance of this relationship and its potential. One of the points emphasized by the communication was the importance of the ‘strategic partnership’ with India for the promotion of ‘effective multilateralism’ and the combat to poverty. The document read, for example, that ‘[t]he EU must help India to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Innovative steps could be envisaged, complementing India’s Development Policy, with special attention to improved governance and environmental sustainability.’ In this example India is portrayed as a partner in need of assistance and the EU as a party in position to help India achieve its goals. Despite the claims that the ‘strategic partnership’ was a relationship between equals and that ‘the EU and India are increasingly seen as forces for global stability’ – as usual in the documents that assess the ‘strategic partnerships’ between the EU and other countries – the European Commission made this act of positioning

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<sup>165</sup> Government of India (2004) *EC Communication titled "An EU-India Strategic Partnership" - India's Response*, 27 August 2004.

<sup>166</sup> European Commission (2006) *The European Union and India: a strategic partnership for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, July 2006.

which aimed to reinforce the strength of the EU within its bilateral engagements and in the international society. Also, in spite of the previous assessments that the EU-India relationship was 'mature' and the assessment in the communication that it was an 'evolving partnership', the European Commission argued that it hoped 'that this will be the starting point of collective reflection on upgrading EU-India relations to a truly strategic partnership'. It is important to stress the use of the word 'truly' in this example because it contradicts the characterization made by India and the EU up to that point that their relationship was a 'strategic partnership'. Hence, for the EU, although the relationship was characterized as promising and in process of evolution, the association with India was not a 'strategic partnership' and should progress more to turn into one. Therein it can be seen why 'strategic partnership' must be characterized and understood as a political concept. The European Commission did not really present criteria to define when a relationship is or is not a 'strategic partnership', it just argued that they wanted to build this kind of relationship with India, that this might be possible in the future, but that at that moment this was not a reality.

In any case, it is important to stress that the European Commission was convinced that India represented a partner with which the EU was willing to develop a deeper relationship. Moreover, the Indian government was also eager to take the relationship with the EU to the next level. On 27 August 2004 the Indian government disclosed an official response to the European Commission's Communication. It was a very similar modus operandi to the one observed one year before in the context of the EU-China 'comprehensive strategic partnership': first the EU presented an evaluation and made its proposals regarding the prospects of the bilateral relationship and then the other party came and exposed its perspective towards the rules of engagement intended by the EU. In its official response, India 'welcome[d] the European Commission's Communication and argued that it was a 'natural outcome' of the efforts that had started in the year 2000 to 'build a new strategic partnership in the political and economic areas'. Therein it is important to call attention to this notion of 'natural partner'. It is a concept that appears in the bilateral language of all the 'strategic partnerships' in which the EU participates, and which is normally associated with the notion of 'shared values'. The response by the Indian government argued that the EU's 'commitment to multilateralism makes it a natural partner for a country like India with a multi-cultural, multi-religious, multiethnic and tolerant society'. Moreover, another notion which is important is the one of 'maturity'. It is also a notion found in the language of other EU 'strategic partnerships'. The Indian government argued that 'as mature partners and established democracies, both sides understand each other's sensitivities and concerns, and their respective offensive and defensive interests'.

Hence, the Indian government was arguing not only that they agreed with the assertive speech act ‘India and the EU are/should be strategic partners’, it also agreed that this was so because of a set of values and goals shared by the parties. ‘Multilateralism’ was a principle that matched the interests of both sides, much like the understanding that a ‘strategic partnership’ originated in the sharing of values like ‘democracy’ and that it is a stage of engagement available only to ‘mature relationships’.

The Indian response also addressed the basic foundation of the ‘strategic partnership’:

‘[w]e see it as a relationship of sovereign equality, based on comparative advantage and a mutuality of interests and benefits, intended to promote the prosperity and well-being of the peoples of India and of the European Union. It visualizes prior consultations with each other on international political, economic, military and security issues of mutual interest, particularly on areas of divergence, in a spirit of cooperation, accommodation and mutual respect. A strategic partnership between India and the EU is special, because the two sides share values, and not just interests.’

This is a particularly important excerpt of the document because the Indian government not only pointed out the basic principles of the ‘strategic partnership’, but it also made an important positioning act. The first element that must be stressed is the argument that the EU-India relationship is a ‘strategic partnership’, one that is different from other relationships defined in these terms by the fact that the parties are bound not only by common interests, but also by ‘shared values’. The statement is particularly interesting because it means that the Indian government believes that a ‘strategic partnership’ is not necessarily defined by ‘shared values’, but by ‘interests’. It presents the ‘strategic partnership’ not as an ordinary ‘strategic partnership’ but as a ‘special’ relationship that has particular features. A second element corresponds to the agenda of the relationship. Here it can be seen that from the beginning the EU-India ‘strategic partnership’ is a very broad relationship with regard to the areas of cooperation envisaged by both sides. If one compares it with the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’ what strikes the reader is the attention given since the beginning to cooperation on ‘military and security issues’. The third and last important aspect of this quote is the principles of cooperation listed by the Indian authorities: ‘sovereign equality’, ‘comparative advantage’, ‘mutuality of interests and benefits’, ‘prior consultations’ (‘particularly on areas of divergence’), ‘spirit of cooperation, accommodation and mutual respect’. The Indian side acknowledged that the parties had individual interests (‘comparative advantage’) and opinions on many issues. It proposed a ‘strategic partnership’ that took this into consideration and that responded accordingly, a relationship in which the parties were about to experience episodes of disagreement but knew that this was to take place and must be dealt in a way that none of the parties would try to impose its interests on the other. As it could be observed in all the previously analyzed ‘strategic partnerships’ of the EU, the element of ‘equality’ was presented as essential. The Indian

government was arguing that in this ‘strategic partnership’ the parties had to acknowledge the differences but treat the other as an equal. This was a very important act of positioning from India if one takes into consideration the important gap of development that separated the EU from India and that the bilateral relationship still incorporated a strong element of development aid, which in principle created a natural internal asymmetry of roles within the ‘strategic partnership’.

However, the Indian government did not simply agree with the basis of cooperation proposed by the EU and emphasized the element of equality. Without assuming a position as strong as the Chinese, on the issue of human rights the Indian government clearly argued that it would not accept pressure from the outside:

‘India believes that the issue of human rights is solely within the national domain. India proposes that issues of interest to both sides be taken up informally either in Brussels or in New Delhi, in accordance with the agreement reached during the Athens Ministerial Troika meeting, with a view to ensure that those issues in which public opinion and the media have an overriding interest, and where distortions need to be corrected, could be effectively addressed in the future. It needs to be emphasized that such an exchange ought to recognize the essential fact that the two sides are unequivocally committed to democratic principles and institutions and should therefore avoid a prescriptive approach on either side. The purpose is to build greater mutual understanding and expand the existing common ground to strengthen the foundations of the strategic partnership.’

Here the Indian government again showed its awareness with respect to the disagreements that would emerge concerning the violation of human rights in the country. In this context, it framed the ‘strategic partnership’ as a relationship in which the EU did not have the right to intervene in Indian domestic affairs. The EU should ‘avoid a prescriptive approach’. Like Russia and China, the Indian government feared the EU’s structural foreign policy, and wanted to be clear about the limits of the relationship. The parties would be able to address sensitive topics, like human rights abuses, without trying to impose its standards on the other party. For the Indian government, the ‘strategic partnership’ with the EU meant a reframing of the relationship with the EU but also an important instrument to project the image of a new great power, an autonomous country and a global player. In this sense, it was important for the Indian authorities to show that the stakes of India were also high and that the country would stand against any behavior from the EU that would jeopardize the individual interests of India.

In its response to the communication, the Indian government showed it basically agreed with the document drafted by the European Commission, but it also openly criticized the EU. For example, the Indian leadership complained about the 2004 accession of ten new Member States to the EU. Article 23 of the Indian document argued that

‘[t]he accession of 10 new countries to the EU in May 2004 has impacted on tariff levels for India’s goods and services, including through introduction of new quotas for textiles & clothing products in the ten new acceding countries, and has resulted in significant implications for trade defence measures. (...)

India proposes a Joint Working Group, to be convened by end-2004, to discuss the opportunities and difficulties that could arise from enlargement and to consider measures to mitigate the negative effects resulting from it.’

Furthermore, regarding the commercial dimension of the bilateral relationship, the Indian government complained that ‘[s]everal EU Member States maintain restrictions which are practically impossible to fulfill for setting up business by developing countries even on a short-term basis, and clearly go against the spirit of a strategic partnership’. Thus this reveals the self-assured posture of the Indian government. It positioned itself as an actor in position of equality and argued that commercial and investment restrictions were against the ‘spirit of the strategic partnership’.

The year 2004 was very interesting in the context of the EU-India ‘strategic partnership’ not only because it was a moment when the parties took the relationship to the next level, but also because the publication of official documents and statements by the parties could be seen as a situation of dialogue. First the European Commission launched its communication, then the Indian government reacted, and finally the parties met at their fifth summit and emitted a joint statement. At the summit in The Hague on 8 November 2004 the parties agreed on a *Joint Press Statement* in which they demonstrated how ‘particularly satisfied’ they were both with the European Commission’s communication and with the Indian response. The parties stressed that ‘their partnership is based on the sound foundation of shared values and beliefs’ and that ‘[o]ur common commitment to democracy, pluralism and the rule of law and to multilateralism in international relations’, which was seen as a ‘factor for global stability and peace’. Hence, the parties showed their unity in respect to an understanding of the nature and framework of their ‘strategic partnership’. This was the perlocutionary effect of their dialogical engagement.

With these developments in mind the parties made the arrangements for the sixth summit in New Delhi on 7 September 2005. Some days before the gathering the president of the European Commission, Mr. Barroso, showed optimism by mentioning the ‘ambitious Action Plan’ that included cooperation in counter-terrorism, security, environmental issues, and trade and investment. The European representative stressed that ‘[b]ased on our joint values, our shared commitment to freedom and democracy, we will forge an ever closer relationship and make the strategic partnership a huge success’<sup>167</sup>. In fact, both the *Political Declaration on the India-EU Strategic Partnership* and the *India-EU Strategic Partnership Joint Action Plan* agreed by the parties at the summit emphasized the importance of shared values as the fundament of the ‘strategic partnership’. The first document pointed out that

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<sup>167</sup> President Barroso to attend EU-India Summit in New Delhi on 7 September, Brussels, 2 September 2005.



‘India and the EU, the largest democracies in the world, share common values and beliefs that make them natural partners in the modern-inter-connected world. We share a common commitment to democracy, pluralism, human rights and the rule of law and seek to pursue economic progress and prosperity for our peoples in a peaceful, stable and secure global environment’.

At the same time, the *Joint Action Plan* presented ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights’ as the basis for strengthening the foundations of the strategic partnership. The parties agreed to:

- Continue in a spirit of equality and mutual respect, the dialogue on Human Rights both in a multilateral and bilateral context, with the objective of building greater mutual understanding and expanding common ground in order to strengthen the foundations of the strategic partnership;
- Consult and discuss positions on human rights and democracy issues and look at opportunities for co-sponsoring resolutions on thematic issues in relevant fora such as UN Commission on Human Rights or UNGA Third Committee;
- Look together for possible synergies and initiatives to promote human rights and democracy’.

The Indian and EU representatives were united in their view that the element of ‘shared values’ was central in their bilateral relationship. The parties also reiterated the importance of a balanced relationship sustained by the pillars of ‘equality’, ‘mutual respect’ and ‘mutual understanding’. It was thus a relationship with both normative and pragmatic characteristics. In addition, it was a relationship that, at least in principle, was established to reformulate the previous framework of bilateral engagement and promote systemic change. The *Joint Action Plan* stressed the potential role of the relationship for the promotion of ‘effective multilateralism’. An interesting quote from the document stated that India and the EU ‘see this partnership as more than just the sum of its parts. We see it as a qualitative transformation in the way we engage as equal partners and work together in partnership with the world at large’. Here the parties gave an important message. Firstly, that the establishment of a ‘strategic partnership’ was not only related to a re-branding of the relationship and with the format of cooperation, it essentially changed the dynamics of the relationship between the parties. Secondly, that the EU-India ‘strategic partnership’ was not limited to the boundaries of a bilateral engagement. It was a concept envisaged to transcend these boundaries. Thirdly, that the parties were united in this understanding of the foundations and goals associated with the ‘strategic partnership’.

A sign of unity was clearly observed in the declarations on both sides, showing that the language used was not merely empty EU rhetoric. In his opening statement at the joint press conference made in the end of the summit,<sup>168</sup> the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh stressed the ‘full potential of our multi-dimensional cooperation’ and also this focus on the notion of ‘good foundations’ that could be observed in the jointly elaborated documents. The

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<sup>168</sup> Singh, Manmohan, *PM's Opening Statement at India-EU Joint Press Conference*, New Delhi, 7 September 2005, <[http://pmindia.gov.in/content\\_print.php?nodeid=182&nodetype=2](http://pmindia.gov.in/content_print.php?nodeid=182&nodetype=2)>, accessed 1 March 2014.

Indian government and the European representatives were speaking to a domestic and international audience and trying to convince it of the legitimacy and potential of the 'strategic partnership'. In this context, Mr. Singh again argued that the relationship was built on 'the common values and beliefs that India and the EU share as the world's two largest democracies, the values that make us natural partners'. Also in his speech at the business summit<sup>169</sup> to an audience formed by businessmen from India and the EU, the Indian Prime Minister argued that '[f]or, in peace and instability, we have the foundations necessary for development and economic growth within the framework of an open society and an open economy'.

During the summit, EU representatives and Indian authorities managed to establish a number of agreements regarding the institutional framework of the 'strategic partnership'. Some of the important decisions taken concerned the establishment of a dialogue on pluralism and diversity and an India-EU security dialogue at senior official level, the creation of a high level trade group to discuss cooperation in trade and investment, the approval of the participation of India in the Global Navigation Satellite System (Galileo), and the inclusion of India as a party at the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER).<sup>170</sup> This shows that the parties were broadening and deepening cooperation, which justifies the excitement found in the declarations on both sides regarding the potential of their joint cooperation.

However, the declarations from the parties were not limited to positive remarks about each other and their 'strategic partnership'. It is important to stress that in the context of a 'strategic partnership' between equals, the Indian government made use of this principle of engagement to position itself as an actor that not only has similarities with the EU, but is its 'natural partner'. The Indian government wanted to show that it was a voice to be heard and in this regard it is important to stress some Indian declarations about the EU. In his speech at the business summit, Prime Minister Singh stressed, for example, that a 'Europe which is growing, a Europe which is not cohesive, the Europe which is outward-oriented is in the interest of the world'. It is important to point out these declarations, because they are indeed important acts of positioning. They show that the language of 'strategic partnership' constituted a relationship in which India could position itself as an actor that not only saw the EU make assessments about how important India is and what it should do, but also as an actor who had something to say about the EU, whose opinion about the EU was also important for the legitimacy of the European integration process. For the Indian government, it was important to consolidate this

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<sup>169</sup> Singh, Manmohan, *PM's address to India-EU Business Summit*, New Delhi, 7 September 2005, <[http://pmindia.gov.in/content\\_print.php?nodeid=183&nodetype=2](http://pmindia.gov.in/content_print.php?nodeid=183&nodetype=2)>, accessed 01 March 2014.

<sup>170</sup> India was included in the project with full membership on 6 December 2005.

aspect of the use of ‘strategic partnership’ related to equality and the legitimacy of India as a global player willing to share its opinions and views about other global players.

However, it was not enough to claim this status. It was important for India to show that the ‘strategic partnership’ with the EU was actually producing outcomes. In this context, in February 2006 the EC-India Joint Working Group met in New Delhi, in May the first EU-India Security Dialogue meeting was held, and a first round of a new dialogue on migration issues and visa policy took place in Brussels in June. The parties were holding regular talks on a great number of areas for bilateral cooperation. In July 2006 the European Commission launched the publication *The European Union and India: a strategic partnership for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. In this monograph the European Commission outlined the history of the bilateral cooperation between the EU and India, highlighted important areas of joint action and provided an assessment of the ‘strategic partnership’. As the title suggested, the Commission stressed the importance of this ‘strategic partnership’ and focused on the global relevance of a deeper bilateral engagement. Some important claims made by the Commission in this document were the healthy status of the relationship, arguing that ‘EU-India global cooperation, based on shared values and philosophies, works well’. The Commission also stressed the notion of ‘natural partners’ and emphasized the important synergies and complementarities between India and the EU by highlighting the commitments ‘to democracy, pluralism, human rights, the rule of law, and independence of judiciaries and the media’ and ‘to an equal and dynamic dialogue on all subjects of mutual interest and concern’. When trying to describe the nature of bilateral political cooperation between the parties, the publication defined it as ‘a constructive, open and equal dialogue based on common values.’

In the second semester of the year the parties prepared for their seventh bilateral summit. Before the high-level bilateral meeting took place in Helsinki on 13 October, the president of the European Parliament made an official visit to India and in a statement on 12 October, the president of the European Commission, Mr. Barroso, highlighted the ‘upgrading of EU-India relations’ with the ‘strategic partnership’<sup>171</sup>. When it was time for the summit, what was observed was an exaltation of the good grounds and health of the bilateral relationship. The *Seventh India-EU Summit Joint Statement* pointed out the ‘significant intensification of the dialogue between the strategic partners’ and the ‘qualitatively enhanced’ engagement between India and EU member-states. Moreover, the *EU-India Joint Action Plan: Implementation Report* disclosed during the summit stressed the several bilateral consultation mechanisms that

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<sup>171</sup> European Commission (2006) *President Barroso to attend Seventh EU-India Summit in Helsinki on 13 October 2006* (IP/06/1357), Brussels, 12 August 2006.

had been implemented, calling attention to the High Level Trade Group constituted during the summit, which after its first meeting recommended the start of negotiations for a trade and investment agreement between India and the EU.

However, more interesting than the joint documents were the speeches of the Indian Prime Minister held in the context of the summit. In his opening statement at the seventh summit, Dr. Singh emphasized the ‘shared values of democracy and respect for human rights’ and the commitments to ‘pluralism and liberty’, which in the words of the Indian representative demonstrated the status of ‘natural partners’ that characterized the bilateral relationship.<sup>172</sup> It is important to see how both the parties underlined in the declaration a shared view that India and the EU are ‘natural partners’ as the basis of the ‘strategic partnership’. Manmohan Singh also made some important arguments that presented the image of mutual dependency as an essential element to cooperation between the EU and India. The Indian prime minister declared that ‘India’s global vision would remain imbalanced without the EU’ while stressing also that he believed ‘the EU’s engagement with Asia would be incomplete without India’.<sup>173</sup>

The Indian prime minister tried to maintain the notion that the engagement between India and the EU was non-hierarchical, balanced relationship and based on natural compatibilities, pushing the parties towards a joint collaboration. Yet in the keynote address at the business summit held the day before, it was clear that he was trying to convince an audience of European investors of the potential of bilateral economic relations and of the opportunities to be explored with India:

‘I invite you to show the spirit of adventure and enterprise of your forefathers and set out to explore the opportunities in India once again. A new India is ready to welcome you with a sense of confidence and hope in the future. As I said, a billion people in India are now seeking the social and economic salvation in the framework of an open polity and an open society. I invite European enterprises to become an active partner in making a success of this phenomenon which I believe is of great historical importance for the humankind in 21st Century. Europe and India must be closer partners’.<sup>174</sup>

This kind of statement is remarkable because it shows that behind the speech acts made both by India and the EU about the nature of their cooperation and the progress made one can also see India struggling for recognition as a partner with a real potential. It also shows that although the parties struggled to consolidate the language of ‘equality’, there were remaining asymmetries in the relationship and that despite all the good publicity made by the Commission,

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<sup>172</sup> Singh, Manmohan (2006) *PM's Opening Statement at Seventh India-EU Summit*, Helsinki, 13 October 2006, <[http://pmindia.gov.in/content\\_print.php?nodeid=409&nodetype=2](http://pmindia.gov.in/content_print.php?nodeid=409&nodetype=2)>, accessed 1 March 2014.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Singh, Manmohan (2006) *PM's keynote address at India-EU Business Summit*, Helsinki, 12 October 2006, <[http://pmindia.gov.in/content\\_print.php?nodeid=408&nodetype=2](http://pmindia.gov.in/content_print.php?nodeid=408&nodetype=2)>, accessed 1 March 2014.

the Indian representatives had to fight for the confidence of the European audience. It is an element that reminds one of the dynamics of the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’.

#### **8.1.4 A ‘Strategic Partnership’ still in Progress?**

In fact, there are other elements found in language that show that both sides were optimistic about the future, but knew that their cooperative relationship was a work in progress. When the European Commission launched its *India Country Strategy Paper* in 2007, this assessment could be found in the document:

‘[t]he **India-EU** relationship has been growing steadily since 1962 when diplomatic relations were established with the European Economic Communities. A regular political dialogue has been boosted through the first Summit held in 2000 and, since the 2004 Summit, is taking the shape of a Strategic Partnership, making India one of the EU’s carefully selected main global partners’.<sup>175</sup>

The quote is important because therein it can be stressed the language construction used by the Commission to define the relationship with India. There is no doubt about the importance given to this ‘global partner’ but it is interesting to observe what was said in the last years of the relationship as it was ‘taking the shape of a Strategic Partnership’. This kind of construction is not exclusive to EU-India relations. Indeed this contradiction between stating that the relationship ‘is a strategic partnership’ and statements arguing that the ‘strategic partnership’ is undergoing a process of construction and consolidation are often seen in the declarations and documents elaborated by the European institutions. It is a meaningful observation when one tries to have a better understanding of the ‘nature’ of ‘strategic partnership’ and the understanding that the parties have of this political concept. In short, the EU is saying that the relationship with India has elements of a ‘strategic partnership’ and is progressing towards becoming one, but so far it has not fulfilled all the criteria to be understood by the EU as such.

Even if in this document of the European Commission one can see signs that cast some doubt on the mutual perception that the parties had about their bilateral cooperation, as the eighth bilateral summit approached there seemed to be a consensus between the parties about the progress of their relationship. In the preparation to the summit, the President of the European Commission argued that

‘[t]he EU continues to be India’s foremost trading partner and biggest foreign investor. We want EU-India trade to reach its potential. And the conclusion of a bilateral Free Trade Agreement will certainly boost bilateral trade. Our political dialogue now ranges from energy and environment to transport and employment, and we expect significant progress in fields such as civil aviation, maritime transport and renewable energy. By joining efforts, the EU and India, the world’s two largest democracies, can have

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<sup>175</sup> Words highlighted in the original text.

a great impact in addressing global challenges such as peace and security, governance and climate change'.<sup>176</sup>

This declaration is meaningful in terms of addressing the status and goals of the EU-India 'strategic partnership'. It shows the relevance given by the EU to the relationship with India and at the same time the kind of cooperation the EU envisaged. It aimed at a comprehensive interaction that involved a great number of areas. This is also very evident in a further declaration of Mr. Barroso at the same occasion, when the European representative argued that 'India-EU bilateral relations have progressed from trade in goods mostly in traditional sectors, and development and economic cooperation until the 1990s, into a "Strategic Partnership"'. Here, once again, one sees the contradiction regarding the nature of the relationship either as a consolidated relationship or as a 'strategic partnership' in the making. But even more important is the message that as the relationship is evolving and moving beyond cooperation 'in traditional sectors' EU and India are building a 'strategic partnership'. It thus demonstrates that a 'strategic partnership', at least in this context, is a non-static relationship characterized by multi-sectoral cooperation. It is a relationship of a higher complexity. And the parties were indeed demonstrating their efforts at deepening their cooperation. At the eighth summit in New Delhi the parties agreed to start the negotiations of a bilateral free-trade agreement. Before that, the EU had already become an observer member at SAARC and attended the bloc's fourteenth summit held in New Delhi in April. And after the Eighth EU-India Summit, in October the ITER agreement finally became effective.

In 2008 the European Union and India met for their ninth summit, which took place in Marseille on 29 September. At this time the parties met to review their joint action plan (JAP). Whereas the summit's *Joint Press Communiqué* emphasized the foundation of the bilateral partnership, arguing that it was 'firmly based on shared values of democracy and human rights, fundamental freedoms (including religious), pluralism, rule of law and multilateralism', the resulting document of the reassessment process, titled *Global Partners for global challenges: The EU-India Joint Action Plan (JAP)*, presented an evaluation of the status of the relationship and pointed out some priorities for further engagement. Regarding the political dialogue, the document read:

'[b]etter political cooperation between the EU and India has been a notable achievement. Existing channels for dialogue have been consolidated since 2005, with a regular calendar of Summits, ministerial meetings, and expert level meetings on subjects such as human rights and consular issues. In addition, new channels have been established, such as the annual security dialogue. New formats for dialogue

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<sup>176</sup> European Commission (2007) *EU- India Summit: setting the path for a growing strategic partnership* (IP/07/1810), Brussels, 29 November 2007.

have also been created through Indian membership of ASEM and EU observer status at SAARC. The EU and India have also pursued issues of common concern within the framework of the United Nations including peacekeeping & peace building. In so far as cooperation between Europol and the CBI is concerned, it needs yet to be activated. The European and Indian Parliaments now have special delegations for promoting bilateral parliamentary relations’.

The document also cherished the growth in the volume of trade and investment in the last five previous years and expressed confidence in a sustainable growth in interdependence based on ‘the many synergies and complementarities that exist between us’. The relationship was becoming deeper in politico-institutional terms and able to deliver results. Another dimension that should be highlighted is the effort made by the parties to claim to an external audience that their bilateral cooperation had a higher purpose. As the title of the document points out, the parties were eager to consolidate the idea that the ‘strategic partnership’ between the EU and India had an important systemic role. They moreover stressed in the text that ‘[o]ur partnership based on shared values and commitment to democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and pluralism is an important pillar of the emerging international order’. This is an element found in all the ‘strategic partnerships’ of which the EU takes part and corroborates the systemic normative dimension of the role of the concept of ‘strategic partnership’ within the framework of the EU foreign policy.

The EU-India ‘strategic partnership’ was framed as a relationship that amplified the notion of the EU as a ‘force for good’ in the international society and was translated into an agenda of cooperation that to some extent tried to address the complexity of the contemporary international agenda. In this context, the strategic partners agreed in 2008 on the *Joint Work Programme: EU-India Co-operation on Energy, Clean Development and Climate Change*, and declared that ‘as key Strategic Partners’ they ‘reiterate their joint commitment urgently address climate change and deepen co-operation in fields relevant to energy, clean development and climate change’. This was an important step because it added specificity to this ‘strategic partnership’, showing how particular this relationship looked in comparison to the other EU ‘strategic partnerships’ and how flexible the understanding of the basic elements of a relationship framed as such can be.

In the following year the notion that the ‘strategic partnership’ should consolidate a diversified agenda continued to be promoted. The European Commission published another leaflet in 2009 with the title *Global partners tackling global challenges*. In this leaflet the Commission argued that ‘[s]ince 2004, the EU & India have built a solid strategic partnership, which aims to push the global agenda on established and emerging challenges, including climate change and terrorism’. If one compares the EU-India ‘strategic partnership’ with the

EU-Brazil relationship, for example, it is interesting to notice the stronger focus of the former on a broader agenda which incorporates all the major global challenges.

At the tenth bilateral summit, held in New Delhi on 6 November 2009, the parties stressed once more this profile of the EU-India ‘strategic partnership’. The *India-EU Joint Statement* made reference to the reviewed *Joint Action Plan* (2008) and emphasized that it ‘has expanded to include diverse areas’ and that the parties ‘have the ambition to build on this to further deepen their dialogue, including on a political level.’ In fact, before the summit, it seemed that the focus on broadening of the agenda was the strategy adopted by the European Commission for this particular summit. Before the summit, the Commissioner for External Relation, Mrs. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, made a statement saying that ‘[a]s long-standing partners, our cooperation has come to fruition in many other key sectors, such as space technology, industrial policy, agriculture, basic education and academic exchanges, which are equally important to consolidate our relationships’.<sup>177</sup> In fact, EURATOM and the Indian government agreed to sign in 2009 the *India-EU Agreement in the field of Fusion Energy Research*. Indeed, within the discourse of ‘strategic partnership’ the EU and India were being able to develop some areas of mutual interest which demonstrated the degree of engagement shown by the each party towards each other.

In a declaration before the summit, Mr. Barroso would argue exactly that,

‘[t]he dynamic strategic partnership we have forged over the years is a sign of strong commitment and mutual understanding to contribute together to global solutions to global challenges, from peace, security and development aid to the fight against climate change. By agreeing a position on climate finance last Friday in Brussels, the EU is signaling that we are ready to help if developing countries and, in particular, emerging economies like India deliver’.<sup>178</sup>

In this example the president of the European Commission explains the positive developments in the bilateral relationship based on ‘strong commitment’ and ‘mutual understanding’. These elements were taken by him as the basis for a successful ‘strategic partnership’ with India.

For the Indian government, however, the explanation was based in a deeper feeling. In his statement to the press at the tenth summit, the Indian prime minister, would stress that ‘our talks were held in a spirit of friendship and warmth, which is the hallmark of India-EU relations’.<sup>179</sup> Moreover, Dr. Singh argued that,

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<sup>177</sup> European Commission (2009), *The EU-India Summit to focus on climate change, energy and trade* (IP/09/1678), Brussels, 5 November 2009.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Singh, Manmohan (2009) *PM's statement to the Press on India-EU Summit*, New Delhi, 6 November 2009, <[http://pmindia.gov.in/content\\_print.php?nodeid=814&nodetype=2](http://pmindia.gov.in/content_print.php?nodeid=814&nodetype=2)>, accessed 1 March 2014.



‘India and the European Union have a Strategic Partnership based on shared values of democracy, pluralism, cultural diversity and respect for human rights. In this context, we reviewed the entire spectrum of our bilateral cooperation. We have identified trade and investment, energy, counter-terrorism, science and technology, climate change, and movement of peoples and as priority areas of our cooperation’.<sup>180</sup>

The Indian prime minister emphasized not only the element of common values as the fundament of the bilateral relationship. In fact, he presented the concept of ‘friendship’ as the basis of the ‘shared values’ which allowed the parties to conceive a complex relationship with an extensive agenda. Therein a comparison to the EU-China ‘strategic partnership’ is pertinent. Although one sees within the framework of the Sino-European relationship an insistence on the notion of friendship, it is much more difficult for the parties to connect the notion of friendship to particular shared values, especially values like ‘democracy’, ‘pluralism’ and ‘human rights’. These values are not presented by the EU and China as the fundament of a complex relationship. This is interesting because although both the EU-India and EU-China ‘strategic partnerships’ are multi-sectoral complex cooperative interactions between two international political actors, it can be seen that they were constituted differently. The same concept of ‘strategic partnership’ is connected to different concepts of ‘friendship’ associated with different shared principles or values.

#### ***8.1.5 A Wider and Deeper ‘Strategic Partnership’ with Concrete Results***

Since the ‘strategic partnership’ was launched in 2004, EU and India managed to sustain a general view of success on the results of their framework of cooperation. The mutual perception that the relationship was delivering tangible results strengthened the legitimacy of this new conceptual framework. In opposition to the relationship between the EU and Russia, the Commission did not have to keep repeating the mantra ‘we are strategic partners’. For most of the audience, there were no doubts that the EU and India were managing to build a ‘strategic partnership’, independently of the existence or not of a fixed understanding for this label.

As the eleventh bilateral summit approached, both sides were confident of further improvements in their relationship. This meant that the parties showed optimism even about complex items on the agenda, such as the negotiations of the bilateral trade agreement. Ahead of the summit, which took place in Brussels on 10 December 2010, the President of the European Commission showed his optimism by arguing that he was ‘particularly confident that we will make headway towards a Free Trade Agreement at this Summit, bringing together

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

markets of one and a half billion people. We should now give the final push to these talks so we can hail a historic agreement when we meet next year in Delhi'.<sup>181</sup> Besides the confidence about the negotiations of this central pillar of the relationship, Brussels and Delhi seemed to share a common understanding about the next steps in their relations. The priority was to broaden and deepen bilateral cooperation.

This was exactly the message delivered by the European and Indian leaders at the summit. In the *EU-India Summit Joint Statement* the parties 'agreed to reinforce their strategic partnership for their mutual benefit in all areas to better contribute to the resolution of the challenges of the twenty first century'. In this context, one element that should be observed cautiously is the kind of expansion of the agenda agreed to on both sides. In the joint statement the parties declared 'that cooperation in combating International Terrorism, including cross border terrorism is one of the key political priorities in the India-EU strategic partnership'. Although the other 'strategic partnerships' of the EU also have a security dimension, this focus on cooperation on counter-terrorism is a distinguishing characteristic of the EU-India 'strategic partnership' and one area of cooperation that the parties aimed to strengthen as their relationship developed further.

However, this was not the single important element in this proposed broadening of the agenda. India and the EU were reaching agreements to strengthen their cooperation in a comprehensive way. For example, they also launched in the context of the summit a policy dialogue on culture. This expansion of the agenda supported the claims often made by the European Commission and the Indian government about the relationship becoming more 'mature'. In his statement after the eleventh EU-India summit, the Indian Prime Minister was not economic in his evaluation of the success of the 'strategic partnership': '[o]ver the years, the partnership between India and the European Union has matured tremendously. Today, it covers the entire gamut of areas ranging from the political and security to education and science. Its significance transcends the purely bilateral'.<sup>182</sup> This insistence in the idea of maturity is interesting because it says much about the understanding that international political actors have of what a 'strategic partnership' is and how its development should take place. The EU-India 'strategic partnership', like the other 'strategic partnerships' in which the EU is involved is normally presented as a process that started with cooperation of a limited scope and then

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<sup>181</sup> *Comments by President Van Rompuy and President Barroso ahead of the EU-INDIA Summit* (PCE 302/10), Brussels, 8 December 2010.

<sup>182</sup> Singh, Manmohan (2010) *PM's opening statement at Joint Press Interaction after the India-EU summit*, Brussels, 10 December 2010, <[http://pmindia.gov.in/content\\_print.php?nodeid=958&nodetype=2](http://pmindia.gov.in/content_print.php?nodeid=958&nodetype=2)>, accessed 1 March 2014.

unfolded and turned into a more comprehensive relationship, extended over multiple areas of cooperation. It is interesting to realize that in different case studies the parties have particular pre-conceived expectations about the phases of development of a 'strategic partnership'. By analyzing how India and the EU construct their understanding of 'strategic partnership' it is important to stress this shared understanding that a 'maturing period' for the relationship to achieve more concrete results is necessary. It is a relevant analytical element because it has an important constitutive function in the relationship and becomes an important criterion of assessment of the success of this 'strategic partnership'.

In the same speech, the Indian prime minister stated that the 'partnership with the European Union is poised for further expansion, and we will work with the EU towards world peace, stability and prosperity'.<sup>183</sup> The parties tried to convince the audience that the relationship was delivering its promises. In his intervention after the summit, Mr. Barroso made an important declaration. He said, 'I believe that the results of this Summit show that our strategic partnership is not a theoretical concept but a very concrete relationship that delivers'. This is an important statement and it shows the usefulness of an analytical framework based on speech act theory to address the uses of 'strategic partnership' in the vocabulary of international politics. It is clearly an assertive speech act. Mr. Barroso was saying in other words that the relationship between the EU and India was indeed a 'strategic partnership' and that could be proved by the tangible results that had been achieved by the parties by means of diverse initiatives of cooperation. With this declaration, he was also saying that these visible results were the conditions of legitimacy of this initiative of bilateral cooperation; they were the preconditions/essential constitutive fundamentals of a relationship defined as 'strategic partnership'.

In addition, the declarations showed that the parties agreed on the next steps for their 'strategic partnership'. After the summit, the President of the European Council reported on the meeting. In his assessment Mr. Van Rompuy stressed not only the character of 'natural partners' and the shared 'core values of democracy, rule of law, respect of human rights' that united the parties. He placed emphasis on 'the enormous potential in our relations that is still to be unblocked, and the necessity to bring our strategic partnership launched in 2004 to a higher level'. In this context, he claimed that two goals should be fulfilled: 'make it wider (in the areas to be unfolded), make it deeper (in those already launched)'.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> European Council The President (2010) *Remarks by Herman VAN ROMPUY President of the European Council following the EU-India Summit* (PCE 308/10), Brussels, 10 December 2010.

This was the spirit of engagement that increased the confidence on both sides regarding the strategic partnership. The concrete results achieved and an open acknowledgement from both sides that the expectations were being fulfilled, allowed Indian and EU representatives to strengthen the rhetoric about the most complex issue of the bilateral agenda: the free trade agreement. In their statements after the summit the representatives from India and the EU, repeated the message given by Mr. Barroso before the summit. On the Indian side, Prime Minister Singh argued that,

‘[o]ur two sides have done commendable work in negotiations of an India-EU Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement. We are at the last stages of this complex exercise. We have directed our officials to redouble their efforts to reach a conclusion by the spring of 2011. Finalisation of a balanced Agreement will bring enormous benefits to both sides’.<sup>185</sup>

On the other side, Mr. Barroso reiterated his previous words, declaring that he was ‘confident that, with the necessary political will, we will be able to hail a path breaking free trade agreement when we meet next year in Delhi. Let us seal the deal in 2011! (...) This is indeed a win-win package for both of us!’<sup>186</sup> In the context of such declarations, there seemed to be good reasons to believe that the leaders from India and the EU had the right to be optimistic. However, the ‘final push’ to the talks about the free trade agreement was not that simple as Mr. Singh and Mr. Barroso were trying to convince the audience of. In October 2011 the twelfth summit, which was scheduled to take place was postponed. The parties declared that insufficient progress had been achieved to justify the meeting (Youngs, 2011). The episode showed evidence that some obstacles would have to be overcome for the ‘strategic partnership’ to get back on track. Different from the language used by political representatives in other strategic partnerships, in the case of the relationship between the EU and India, there was no such an emphasis on the recognition that disagreements are normal and expected in a ‘strategic partnership’. The adjournment of the summit initiated a critical period in the relationship.

### ***8.1.6 Managing the Crises: ‘Strategic Partnership’ as a Language for the Normalization of Bilateral Relations***

The Twelfth EU-India Summit was postponed to February 2012. In January the parties had already held a meeting of the India-EU Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism and there

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<sup>185</sup> Singh, Manmohan (2010) *PM's opening statement at Joint Press Interaction after the India-EU summit*. Brussels, 10 December 2010, <[http://pmindia.gov.in/content\\_print.php?nodeid=958&nodetype=2](http://pmindia.gov.in/content_print.php?nodeid=958&nodetype=2)>, accessed 1 March 2014.

<sup>186</sup> Barroso, Jose Manuel Durao, *Statement by President Barroso following the EU-India Summit* (SPEECH/10/749), Brussels, 10 December 2010.

was an effort from both sides to restore confidence in the bilateral relationship. In fact, at the summit, which took place in New Delhi on 10 February, Indian and EU representatives made a strong effort to set the relationship back on track. In this context, the *India-European Union Joint Statement* addressed the disagreements concerning the free-trade agreement in a conciliatory tone. Article 4 of the document read:

‘[L]eaders expressed satisfaction that since the last India-EU Summit in December 2010, negotiations on the India-EU Broad based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) have intensified with substantial progress achieved across the board on different areas. Both sides have engaged intensively to find solutions for outstanding issues which are mutually acceptable. Negotiations on an ambitious and balanced package are now close to completion which is expected to provide a new thrust to bilateral trade, investment and economic cooperation. This is especially significant in the context of the current economic climate so as to provide a new impetus to growth. Commerce, Industry and Textile Minister, Shri Anand Sharma and European Trade Commissioner, Mr. Karel De Gucht would monitor the progress of these negotiations for an early conclusion’.

However, despite the attempt to show the audience that the leaders from both sides were making an effort to solve the different positions about the free-trade agreement, the joint statement acknowledged the lack of consensus in some areas. Article 14, for example, expressly stated that ‘[L]eaders reiterated their respective positions on the inclusion of aviation in the EU Emissions Trading System and noted the strong divergence of views’.

After the summit individual statements from the authorities from both sides also showed an interest in focusing on the positive aspects of bilateral cooperation. EU and Indian representatives did not refrain from mentioning some differences between the parties but ultimately made an effort to convince the audience that relations were back to normal and that the EU-India ‘strategic partnership’ remained a relationship with a great systemic potential. Some interesting uses of language observed in the statement of the Indian Prime Minister at the press conference after the summit were, for example, the reference to the notion of friendship in his description of the atmosphere during the summit: ‘[w]e have just concluded extremely productive and wide-ranging discussions in a very cordial and friendly atmosphere’.<sup>187</sup> In the same statement, Dr. Singh also made an assertive speech act: ‘India and the European Union are strategic partners in a fast changing and complex world’.<sup>188</sup> He also stressed the aspect of ‘mutual benefit’ by arguing that he ‘conveyed to the EU leadership the importance India attaches to EU’s participation in our growth agenda including in infrastructure development, clean energy technologies, innovation, research and skill development. Greater investment

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<sup>187</sup> Singh, Manmohan, *Statement by the Prime Minister at the Joint Media Interaction at Twelfth India-EU Summit*. New Delhi, 10 February 2012, <[http://pmindia.gov.in/content\\_print.php?nodeid=1138&nodetype=2](http://pmindia.gov.in/content_print.php?nodeid=1138&nodetype=2)>, accessed 1 March 2014.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

flows in both directions in a win-win proposition for both sides'.<sup>189</sup> Finally, he emphasized his belief that the EU-India relationship 'is a partnership that will assume greater global significance in the years to come'.<sup>190</sup>

On the EU side, Mr. Van Rompuy also intended to regain the confidence of the audience. He did this by focusing on three elements: that there was a good environment between the parties, that there were visible positive results from bilateral cooperation and that the relationship between the EU and India has a systemic role. In his statement the President of the European Council argued that,

'[t]his morning, we had a rich and constructive discussion with the Prime Minister. We share a common determination to move the EU-India relationship forward. We made significant progress in a number of fields and set the tone for the future. Our common objective is to turn our growing cooperation into mutual opportunities, and to turn our strategic partnership into a key element for the global architecture'.<sup>191</sup>

In another speech given after the summit, Mr. Van Rompuy also condensed in three points the priorities of EU-India engagement: '[p]lease allow me to conclude with a few remarks on what Europe and India can do together. Let me just mention three points: trade, security and global issues'.<sup>192</sup>

The way the crisis emerged due to the difficulties on reaching an agreement on the free trade agreement, how the crisis was treated and how the parties tried to solve it show how fragile the EU-India 'strategic partnership' is. In fact, this example also presents similarities with the EU's other 'strategic partnerships'. In this case, what differentiates the EU-India 'strategic partnership' from the other cases I have analyzed so far is that the relationship evolved in very good terms, without signs of troubles until an actual crisis emerged. The EU-India 'strategic partnership' seemed to be achieving the goals agreed by the parties. It was becoming a broader and deeper cooperative relationship. There were no major voices from either side that questioned that the relationship was indeed a 'strategic partnership'. Despite these characteristics, a deadlock in one of the central points of the bilateral agenda had important negative consequences for the relationship. Facing this situation, the authorities from India and the EU had to find a common ground, and convince the audience and themselves again that a particular challenge, disagreement or 'bump on the road' did not mean that the 'strategic partnership' had lost its purpose or was actually not true. Therein one observes the importance

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> European Council The President, *Remarks by President Herman Van Rompuy following the Twelfth EU-India summit* (EUCO 24/12; PRESSE 40; PR PCE 20), New Delhi, 10 February 2012.

<sup>192</sup> European Council The President, *Speech by President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy at the India International Centre: 'The European Union in a changing world'* (EUCO 25/12; PRESSE 41; PR PCE 21), New Delhi, 10 February 2012.

of assertive speech acts for the legitimacy and sustainability of the EU's 'strategic partnerships'. Moreover, this episode also shows that the EU's 'strategic partnerships', as relationships constituted and sustained by such a fluid political concept, can be easily put into question and be faced with crises of legitimacy. On the other hand, they can also be more easily rescued from troublesome situations. That in no way means that episodes of crisis do not deteriorate the images that the parties have from each other. In fact, some crises can have a much more effective constitutive impact than some speech acts. In any case, the EU-India 'strategic partnership' demonstrates that this particular relationship – like other relationships framed as 'strategic partnership' – constantly has to prove itself, to show that it delivers. And when this is not the case, a crisis rapidly emerges. This sort of crisis – through the political will of the parties involved – can be solved relatively easily and relations tend to return quickly to normality on the level of political dialogue. On the other hand, they also tend to undermine the confidence of the audience regarding the strength of the pillars that sustain the relationship. In short, it can be said that this, like other 'strategic partnerships' held by the EU, like the relationships with China and Russia, lack the strength that would be expected from relationships based on common values and common interests.

## **8.2 Understanding the Meaning of 'Strategic Partnership' in the Context of EU-India Relations**

In this chapter it was shown that the EU-India 'strategic partnership' experienced some different phases in the last years. It was a very particular trajectory that constituted a relationship with a set of features of its own.

Since the *Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development* (1994) both sides have emphasized the notion of 'partnership' as a relationship related to the notions of universal human rights and democracy. At this moment there was a great interest from both sides in establishing a 'closer and upgraded relationship' or an 'enhanced partnership'. The strengthening of the political dialogue led to the first summit in 2000, where the language of 'strategic partnership' was introduced as a framework for bilateral relations.

At this initial stage, shared fundamental values were presented as the central pillar of a relationship which aimed at developing an enhanced and multi-faceted cooperation that could generate mutual benefit to the parties and have a systemic impact. The 'strategic partnership' was presented as an ambitious relationship, which had a 'moral duty' to 'heal the world'.

Interestingly, in comparison to other of the EU's strategic partnership, it was a relationship that emphasized the necessity of developing security cooperation further since the beginning.

At the fifth EU-India summit a new phase was inaugurated. In its essence, the relationship was not changed. The parties continued to stress the importance of shared values and interests. However, new elements were added to the linguistic context that framed the relationship. Both sides emphasized the importance of bringing the relationship to the next level. It was time to establish a 'truly strategic partnership' between 'mature' and 'natural partners', 'a constructive, open and equal dialogue based on common values'.

Bilateral dialogue moved forward and both the Indian government and EU officials were willing to internalize the notion of 'global partners for global challenges'. The agenda of cooperation was broadened to include topics like climate change, clean development and research on fusion energy. The idea of 'friendship' started to appear with frequency in speeches from representatives of both sides. In the words of the President of the European Commission, the 'strategic partnership' 'is not a theoretical concept but a very concrete relationship that delivers'.

However, when a 'strategic partnership' is defined in its essence by the fact that it achieves its goals – i.e. that it delivers – the parties run the risk of having to deal with a crisis when a goal is not reached. In a relationship which, differently from the cases of China and Russia, the parties had not been constantly preparing themselves for dealing with possible disappointments and failures, the lack of progress in the negotiations of the free trade and investment agreement led to the crisis of 2011. Khandekar (2013, p. 1) has noted that the negotiations of the free trade agreement 'soak up most of the attention and risk pegging the entire relationship to their success or failure'.

The representatives from both sides tried to contain the effects of this disagreement on the perceptions about the 'strategic partnership' by their respective audiences. They did not refrain from asserting that the lack of success in the negotiations of this central agreement did not change the nature of the bilateral cooperative engagement between the parties. But like in the EU-Russia relationship, this led to a questioning of the 'strategic' essence of the relationship. Khandekar (2013, p. 7), for example, argues that '[s]o far the EU-India relationship has lacked the spark of a truly strategic partnership'. As I have been arguing, I claim that this kind of reading is mistaken because it derives from a pre-established understanding of 'strategic partnership'. On the other hand, it must be recognized that the impossibility of reaching a deal made the relationship lose momentum. The low expectations that the parties might be able to reach an agreement soon have been slowly damaging the relationship. Since the EU-India



‘strategic partnership’ has been constituted as a relationship that is dependent on the fulfillment of a set of particular goals, it will be difficult for authorities on both sides to think about the next steps in the relationship if they do not manage to deal with the unfinished businesses related to the BTIA.

The EU-India ‘strategic partnership’ has some similarities with the other strategic partnerships established by the EU and the rest of the BRIC countries analyzed so far. Notions of ‘equality’, ‘friendship’, ‘natural partners’, ‘maturity’ are also present. But the use and understanding of these references is very particular to this specific relationship and constitutes a ‘strategic partnership’ that differentiates itself from the others. It is important to stress that even when the same words are used and the same references to values are made, very different relationships can emerge.

It was not the goal of this chapter to make a detailed comparison between the ‘strategic partnerships’ between India and the EU and India and the US, but it is an interesting example that can be mentioned briefly for the sake of analysis. Both relationships are framed as ‘strategic partnerships’ but they are clearly different in terms of agenda and internal dynamics. In 2004 India and the US announced their *Next Steps in Strategic Partnership* (NSPP) and agreed in 2009 on and *India-US Strategic Dialogue*. According to this framework of bilateral cooperation, high-level representatives of the two countries have been meeting annually and the countries have been aiming to intensify cooperation in a great number of areas like trade and investment, women’s rights and civil nuclear cooperation. The *US-India Strategic Dialogue Joint Statement* justifies this broad cooperation as part of a ‘global strategic partnership (...) for the promotion global peace, stability, economic growth and prosperity’. And like it could be seen in the joint statements agreed on in the EU-India summits, this US-India joint statement also makes reference to shared values, stating that ‘the India-U.S. partnership rests of the firm foundation of common ideals as well as security and economic interests’. However, despite this similar use of language and the interest announced by the parties to broaden the scope of the agenda, the India-US relationship is a relationship based essentially on security concerns, whereas, as it has been seen in this chapter, trade and investment are at the centre of the EU-India agenda. In addition, whereas the EU and India have been working to develop an ever more equal relationship, the India-US ‘strategic partnership’ remains a clearly asymmetrical interaction. Even if one acknowledges that both ‘strategic partnerships’ have an important systemic role, the global implications of each relationship are different. Whereas the India-EU strategic partnership is associated with the EU’s structural foreign policy, the relationship

between the US and India is related to more specific geopolitical calculations of these two countries.

The EU-India 'strategic partnership' is a *sui generis* relationship. It is a comprehensive relationship in terms of its agenda but that undeniably has economic cooperation at its core. It is sustained by consolidated shared values and indeed the interaction between the partners resembles more notions of 'friendship' than 'enmity' or 'rivalry'. But it is a relationship framed strongly in terms of performance. And unlike the EU 'strategic partnerships' with China and Russia, the audience does not expect constant disagreements or major set-backs between the parties. In this context, the main challenge faced by Indian and EU officials is to sustain the perception that the relationship can keep delivering visible results. However, as Jain (2014, p. 19) reasonably claims, '[d]espite shared values, the lack of shared interests on a number of issues will continue to limit cooperation'. That does not mean that in the short term the inability to reach an agreement on the negotiations of the BTIA will lead to a deadlock in cooperation, but in the medium and long term this and other disagreements could damage further the basis of the 'strategic partnership' and put its resilience to the test. In this context, in fact the EU and India should not only try to solve the disagreements regarding the trade and investment agreement. It would be important, as proposed by Khandekar (2013), to make use of the broad framework of dialogue developed in the last decade and focus on results in other areas.

## **9 Uses and Meanings of ‘Strategic Partnership’: Implications for Agency, Policy and Theory**

My thesis established a language-based theoretical framework to assess the term ‘strategic partnership’ in its uses in the language of international politics. The four case studies conducted in the Chapters 5 to 8 aimed at focusing on the different conversational histories that show the contexts in which it was possible for the EU to frame and sustain relationships defined as ‘strategic partnership’ with Russia, Brazil, China and India in particular time frames. These analyses have important implications for understanding the functions of ‘strategic partnership’ as a political concept within the EU foreign policy and in international politics more generally. Furthermore, they make important contributions for a discussion on agency, policy and theory in international politics.

My last chapter will be divided into four steps. I first present and summarize the general conclusions drawn from a comparison of the four ‘strategic’ partnerships discussed in the thesis. Secondly, I discuss the implications of these conclusions for an understanding of the European Union’s ‘strategic partnerships’. Third, I focus on the implications of this analysis for our understanding of ‘strategic partnership’ on a broader scope, i.e. in international politics. Finally, I make some points about the theoretical implications of the present thesis for theory and further research.

### **9.1 Comparing the Results of a Language-based Analysis of the ‘Strategic Partnerships’ between the EU and the BRIC Countries**

The main goal of my thesis was to provide a framework to understand what a ‘strategic partnership’ is without stabilizing the meaning of this expression. In this context, it was necessary from an ontological, epistemological and methodological point of view to focus on the micro level of interaction in which a dialogical conversation could be visualized between the representatives of the European institutions and of EU’s strategic partners. This is the reason why it was essential to present the case studies in a linear and historic analysis, which could take into account the notion of ‘process’ and that meaning is not static but ever-changing and dependent on the results of speech acts and repositionings made by those taking part in a bilateral relationship. Each empirical chapter told a different story, different ways in which ‘strategic partnership’ was used to frame particular relationships in specific phases of bilateral interaction. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore that bilateral relationships do not develop in a

vacuum. They take place within a systemic level of interaction. They operate according to the foreign policy rationale of each of the actors involved. This takes into consideration implications for the system and for the interaction with other international political actors. In this context, comparisons can and should be made not with the aim to identify supposedly basic properties of ‘strategic partnership’ taken as a mere form of association between international political actors, but to understand how particular assumptions and elements framing foreign policy strategies are incorporated in the language of ‘strategic partnership’.

Tables 1 to 4 present some linguistic elements found in the ‘conversations’ between European Union representatives and representatives from the BRIC countries. They should not by any means be taken as the elements that define the ‘meaning’ of ‘strategic partnership’. The tables do not take into consideration the historic processes of enunciations and repositionings, which were presented thoroughly in the previous chapters. They simply sum up and present elements mobilized via language in different points in time that were introduced by the parties in their linguistic engagement and help the analyst to have a broader understanding of the scope of each individual ‘strategic partnership’ discussed in the thesis, to make some comparisons and to draw some analytically relevant conclusions. Table 5 complements the first four tables bringing back to analysis the element of ‘change’ and highlighting some important differences between the EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’ when focus is put on ‘language’ and ‘process’.

It is undeniable that some elements, ideas, notions and terms can be found in the linguistic environment of all the EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’ analyzed in this thesis. However, to observe the repetition of these elements – e.g. the principle of ‘equality’ and the references to ‘friendship’ – and assume that a ‘strategic partnership’ is a form of association between equals, who also happen to be friends, would be a misinterpretation of the empirical case studies. An analysis which focuses on language, processes and positionings puts emphasis on how some linguistic elements are introduced in a dialogical conversation in a specific manner, in a specific point in time, and how this affects the construction of meaning of ‘strategic partnership’.

The EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’ is a relationship influenced by a particular scenario of intense political transition in Russia. It is a concept with a particular function in a context of clash between a discourse of interdependence and a discourse of incompatibilities. The EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’ is informed by dichotomies like ‘friend x foe’, ‘trust x distrust’, ‘shared values x incompatibilities’ and thus must constantly fight for its legitimacy to be recognized as a ‘truly strategic partnership’. If one takes ‘strategic partnership’ as a language with a constitutive function, it is clear that shared goals do not change as much as the internal

**Table 1: The Vocabulary of the EU-Russia ‘Strategic Partnership’**

Principles of the ‘strategic partnership’	Ideas, assumptions and metaphors used	Dichotomies that permeate bilateral dialogue	Goals of the ‘strategic partnership’	References to ‘friendship’
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>.democracy</li> <li>. human rights</li> <li>. rule of law</li> <li>. market economy</li> <li>. freedom of speech</li> <li>. pluralism</li> <li>. equality</li> <li>. mutual respect of interests</li> <li>. mutual benefit</li> <li>. adherence to common values</li> <li>. compromise solutions</li> <li>. tactical differences</li> <li>. pragmatism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. positive interdependence</li> <li>. rapprochement</li> <li>. natural partners</li> <li>. high level of mutual confidence</li> <li>. Russia is a major partner of the EU and a natural member of the European family</li> <li>. cultural affinity</li> <li>. shared/mutual interests</li> <li>. open and constructive dialogue</li> <li>. true cooperation and partnership</li> <li>. divergence</li> <li>. two strategic partners, neighbours and friends</li> <li>. equitable strategic partnership</li> <li>. reliable relations</li> <li>. mistrust</li> <li>. incompatibilities</li> <li>. real strategic convergence</li> <li>. vicious circle</li> <li>. trust</li> <li>. unavoidable partnership</li> <li>. strategic partnership of a special kind</li> <li>. Saint Petersburg as Russia’s window to Europe</li> <li>. colleagues</li> <li>. difficulties and discourse about incompatibilities pollute and contaminate progress towards good collaboration</li> <li>. we do not want a ‘reset’, we want a ‘fast forward’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. trust x distrust</li> <li>. convergence x divergence</li> <li>. shared values and interests x incompatibilities</li> <li>. friend x foe</li> <li>. incompatibilities x positive cooperation</li> <li>. rapprochement x dividing lines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. stable, open and pluralistic democracy in Russia</li> <li>. maintaining European stability and promoting global security</li> <li>. long-term strategic partnership</li> <li>. four common spaces</li> <li>. an open and integrated market between the EU and Russia</li> <li>. Europe without dividing lines</li> <li>. Partnership of equals with respect for individual interests and resolution of disagreements without pessimism and mistrust</li> <li>. new agreement to replace the PCA</li> <li>. all comprehensive New European Security System</li> <li>. a more reliable partnership at all levels (build-up trust)</li> <li>. a real strategic partnership</li> <li>. modernization of Russia</li> <li>. a truly strategic partnership</li> <li>. transform interdependence by necessity into an interdependence by choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. good friends</li> <li>. like good friends we discuss issues, frankly and constructively, including topics where our views may diverge, and we try to find a common ground</li> </ul>

**Table 2: The Vocabulary of the EU-Brazil ‘Strategic Partnership’**

<b>Principles of the ‘strategic partnership’</b>	<b>Ideas, assumptions and metaphors used</b>	<b>Dichotomies that permeate bilateral dialogue</b>	<b>Goals of the ‘strategic partnership’</b>	<b>References to ‘friendship’</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. principles of the UN Charter</li> <li>. democratic values and human rights</li> <li>. respect for the rule of law</li> <li>. concern about climate change</li> <li>. pursuit of economic growth and social justice at home and abroad</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. friendly relations and traditional links</li> <li>. close historical, cultural and economic ties</li> <li>. natural strategic partners</li> <li>. not just history but a common destiny</li> <li>. a common vision</li> <li>. enduring process of convergence</li> <li>. a sum of positive factors which turn Brazil into an attractive and reliable partner</li> <li>. growing influence of Brazil</li> <li>. Brazil’s rapid development as a global economic and political player</li> <li>. Brazil’s new status as a ‘global leader’</li> <li>. Brazil as a ‘champion of the developing world in the UN and at the WTO’</li> <li>. Brazil as a vital ally for the EU</li> <li>. Brazil as a natural leader in South America and a key player in Latin America</li> <li>. Brazil’s positive leadership in South America</li> <li>. Brazil as a major EU investment hub</li> <li>. Brazil as a pillar of South America’s stability</li> <li>. Brazil as a powerful force</li> <li>. the vitality of our relationship</li> <li>. excellent progress</li> <li>. allies</li> <li>. never-ending relationship</li> <li>. lots of affinity</li> <li>. Brazil is more than a strategic partner, is a like-minded country</li> <li>. a true political partnership</li> <li>. strategic complicity</li> <li>. necessity of a new approach</li> <li>. rapprochement</li> <li>. mutual trust</li> </ul>	<p>NONE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. working together to promote prosperity, to protect the environment and reform global governance</li> <li>. building our future together</li> <li>. preparing a fairer world</li> <li>. confronting global challenges together</li> <li>. step up and diversify economic links</li> <li>. expansion of trade</li> <li>. investment</li> <li>. support initiatives for regional integration</li> <li>. modernization of the economy and liberalization of trade in Brazil</li> <li>. strategic partnership should help Brazil in exercising positive leadership globally and regionally and to engage with the EU in a global, strategic, substantial and open dialogue both bilaterally and in multilateral and regional fora</li> <li>. Establishing a ‘wider strategic association’ between the EU and Mercosur</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. friendly relations</li> <li>. friends</li> <li>. the friendship that unites Brazil and the EU and each one of its members</li> </ul>

**Table 3: The Vocabulary of the EU-China ‘Strategic Partnership’**

<b>Principles of the ‘strategic partnership’</b>	<b>Ideas, assumptions and metaphors used</b>	<b>Dichotomies that permeate bilateral dialogue</b>	<b>Goals of the ‘strategic partnership’</b>	<b>References to ‘friendship’</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. equality</li> <li>. mutual advantage</li> <li>. comprehensive cooperation</li> <li>. one China policy</li> <li>. reciprocity</li> <li>. mutual emulation, common prosperity and complementarity</li> <li>. consultation on equal basis</li> <li>. openness</li> <li>. mutual accommodation</li> <li>. shared responsibility</li> <li>. mutual learning</li> <li>. common prosperity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. huge political partners</li> <li>. world’s biggest trading partners</li> <li>. lack of mutual trust</li> <li>. policy towards China is the most important factor in the EU’s image</li> <li>. China is a growing military and economic power</li> <li>. strategic partnership as a natural development necessitated by the facts of life</li> <li>. modern partnership</li> <li>. mature partnership</li> <li>. ever maturing and deepening EU-China comprehensive strategic partnership</li> <li>. a true partnership</li> <li>. there is no conflict of fundamental interests between Asia and Europe</li> <li>. Asia-Europe cooperation is pragmatic and effective</li> <li>. crucial to have a dialogue in friendship and trust</li> <li>. growing interdependence</li> <li>. two major strategic forces in the world</li> <li>. without trust there is no major foundation for cooperation</li> <li>. consolidating strategic trust</li> <li>. passengers in the same boat</li> </ul>	<p>NONE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. intensify and diversify trade and actively develop economic and technical cooperation in line with the mutual interests of the parties</li> <li>. develop a long term relationship with China that reflects China’s worldwide, as well as regional, economic and political influence</li> <li>. promote a dialogue on regional and global security issues which encourages full Chinese engagement in the international community through accession to all key international instruments governing non-proliferation and arms control</li> <li>. reformed public management system in China based on civil society and the rule of law</li> <li>. promote a responsible and constructive Chinese role in the region</li> <li>. the successful and lasting integration of China as an equal partner in the world economy</li> <li>. create a strong and open civil society based on fundamental freedoms and human rights in China</li> <li>. safeguard and promote sustainable development, peace and stability</li> <li>. seek common ground while reserving differences, and contribute to world peace and stability</li> <li>. promote the EU’s understanding of Tibet</li> <li>. increase exchanges between political parties in China and the EU</li> <li>. negotiation of the PCA</li> <li>. cooperation on climate change and energy</li> <li>. cooperation on illegal migration</li> <li>. cooperation on human rights</li> <li>. market economy status for China</li> <li>. increase market access</li> <li>. cooperation on intellectual property rights</li> <li>. negotiation of the arms embargo</li> <li>. tackle weapons proliferation</li> <li>. work with African partners to ensure sustainable development</li> <li>. raise the EU’s profile in China to enhance mutual understanding</li> <li>. develop a reliable, constructive and forward looking strategic partnership fully aware of convergences and divergences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. friendly relations</li> <li>. friendly manner</li> <li>. friendly consultation</li> </ul>

**Table 4: The Vocabulary of the EU-India ‘Strategic Partnership’**

<b>Principles of the ‘strategic partnership’</b>	<b>Ideas, assumptions and metaphors used</b>	<b>Dichotomies that permeate bilateral dialogue</b>	<b>Goals of the ‘strategic partnership’</b>	<b>References to ‘friendship’</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. democracy and respect for human rights</li> <li>. equality, non-discrimination and mutual benefit</li> <li>. rule of law</li> <li>. fundamental freedoms</li> <li>. diversity, plurality and tolerance</li> <li>. shared values and mutual respect</li> <li>. maturity</li> <li>. multilateralism</li> <li>. sovereign equality</li> <li>. comparative advantage</li> <li>. prior consultations</li> <li>. spirit of cooperation, accommodation and mutual respect</li> <li>. avoidance of prescriptive approaches on either side</li> <li>. human rights solely within the national domain</li> <li>. strong commitment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. growth of interdependence</li> <li>. shared values of India and Europe</li> <li>. the vitality of cultures</li> <li>. heal the world: EU and India have a moral duty</li> <li>. India is a key partner and a natural cornerstone of the EU’s relationship with South Asia</li> <li>. moral duty to combat international terrorism and promote respect for human dignity</li> <li>. a mature relationship</li> <li>. India is changing dramatically and fast</li> <li>. India’s democracy healthier and more vibrant than ever</li> <li>. India experiencing great progress in foreign and domestic policy issues</li> <li>. evolving partnership</li> <li>. strategic partnership between India and the EU is special since they not only share interests, but also values</li> <li>. India and the EU share common values and beliefs that make them natural partners in the modern-interconnected world</li> <li>. global partners</li> <li>. a relationship that is taking the shape of a strategic partnership</li> </ul>	NONE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. greater mutual understanding</li> <li>. create opportunities for cross-learning</li> <li>. establishment of links of solidarity and new forms of cooperation</li> <li>. safeguard peace and establish a just and stable international order in accordance with the UN charter</li> <li>. promote prosperity, the commitment to economic reforms and liberalization of the economy, free trade and the enhancement of economic stability, social progress and the development of cultural ties</li> <li>. promote peace and international stability</li> <li>. enable each party to consider the position and interests of the other party in their respective decision-making processes</li> <li>. further development and diversification of trade and investment</li> <li>. establish an enhanced partnership</li> <li>. help India face structural adjustment</li> <li>. establish a mutually beneficial partnership</li> <li>. strive for a comprehensive convention on international terrorism</li> <li>. eradication of chemical and biological weapons and complete elimination of nuclear weapons</li> <li>. promote stability and democracy around the globe</li> <li>. reduce poverty in India</li> <li>. push the global agenda on established and emerging challenges, including climate change and terrorism</li> <li>. make the partnership wider, make it deeper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. friendly consultations</li> <li>. excellent relations and traditional links of friendship</li> <li>. spirit of friendship and warmth</li> <li>. cordial and friendly atmosphere</li> </ul>



*Table 5: A General Assessment of the Processes of Change in the EU's Strategic Partnerships*

<b>Strategic partner</b>	<b>Previous common ground</b>	<b>Number of phases</b>	<b>Intensity of repositionings</b>	<b>Types of speech acts</b>	<b>Changes in the internal hierarchy</b>	<b>Increase in mutual trust</b>
Russia	tense	4	High	assertive, directive, commissive	from asymmetrical to equitable relationship	NO
Brazil	cooperative	4	Low	assertive, directive, commissive	from initially very asymmetrical to slightly asymmetrical	to some extent
China	suspicious	3	intermediate	assertive, directive, commissive	equitable from start	limited
India	cooperative	3	intermediate	assertive, directive, commissive	less asymmetrical than in the beginning but still slightly asymmetrical	limited

hierarchy of the relationship, which progressively shifts from an asymmetrical to an equitable relationship. Unlike what was seen in the case study on the EU-China ‘strategic partnership’, there are no disagreements about what a ‘friendship’ entails, but the parties did not internalize this notion. As I argued in Chapter 5, if the EU and Russia are friends, they are stubborn friends who are not eager to compromise. The assertive speech act, ‘we are good friends’ was not successful. In other of the EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’ it could be seen that the notion ‘disagreements are possible between strategic partners’ is constantly enunciated, but in the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’ what was internalized as a rule was the understanding that disagreements contaminate and pollute cooperation. ‘Friendship’ within this ‘strategic partnership’ was a concept enunciated in support of the discourse of ‘strategic partnership’, i.e. as a challenge to the discourse that focuses on incompatibilities and argues that positive interdependence is not possible.

The EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’ is the relationship that has the lowest number of common features with the other relationships analyzed in this thesis. Cooperation is based on a high degree of value-sharing. Brazil is presented as a ‘like-minded country’; ‘trust’ is not necessarily taken as an issue; ‘friendship’ is a given. However, in terms of agenda and mutual beneficial results, the parties have not been as effective in validating their ambitious ‘comprehensive’ ‘strategic global action’. It is the single one of the ‘strategic partnerships’ analyzed in this thesis that did not include cooperation in security and defense from its beginning, showing that the understanding that the parties have regarding the phases of development of a ‘strategic partnership’ are different. ‘Strategic complicity’ and the notion of ‘common destiny’ did not make the relationship more dynamic. In turn, the establishment of a ‘strategic partnership’ and the move towards more equality did not lead to an increase in disagreements either. Of course, common interests exist and disagreements as well. But although the parties have a hard time making the relationship more comprehensive and deeper, disagreements – like those related to the Mercosur-EU association agreement – do not lead to crises, like in all the three other ‘strategic partnerships’ discussed in the previous chapters. They take the ‘strategic partnership’ as a ‘never-ending relationship’ in constant flow.

The EU-China ‘strategic partnership’ is a relationship that shares many similarities with the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’. It also faces the challenges of promoting convergence in terms of shared values and of building up mutual trust. However, this is where the communalities end. The framing process of this ‘strategic partnership’ followed different steps. It was a relationship in which ‘equality’ was a claim from start. ‘Human rights’ is an issue also in the EU-Russia and EU-India ‘strategic partnerships’, but it is a much more important obstacle

in this particular relationship. It is a relationship that has been changing but whose basic rules have been kept almost intact. The agenda became more complex, more ‘comprehensive’, but ‘equality’ was used to impede repositionings and allow change. ‘Maturity’ was not translated into an ability to openly deal with different positions. One important aspect observed in the analysis of the uses of ‘strategic partnership’ in the EU-China relationship is how it demonstrated a conflict of understandings regarding the notion of ‘friendship’. Whereas the parties were eager to stress a friendly environment of engagement, they were not able to prove that they could deal with challenges in a non-confrontational manner. As the episode of the adjournment of the eleventh summit in 2008 shows, disagreements were taken by the Chinese government as the justification for a crisis. Despite all these challenges, the EU-China ‘strategic partnership’ never suffered so many criticisms regarding its legitimacy as the EU-Russia relationship. References about some sort of ‘gap of values’, which would support any denial that the EU and China have a ‘true strategic partnership’, could not be found. Moreover, it is a relationship, which albeit its challenges has been undergoing relevant changes. The parties have been recognizing the necessity to converge in a common understanding of how their bilateral relationship should be framed and what it should achieve. They know that there is a long road ahead in terms of increasing mutual trust but they acknowledge that they can learn from each other.

The EU-India ‘strategic partnership’ was a relationship that was framed in balanced terms, claiming for ‘equality’ as one of its main principles. However, it was and still is a slightly asymmetrical relationship. Like in the other ‘strategic partnerships’ analyzed in the present thesis, some common elements have been used to constitute the framework of the bilateral relationship, e.g. ‘natural partner’, ‘equality’, ‘maturity’, but the trajectory followed by the parties in their cooperative engagement was particular. The parties make reference to shared values like ‘democracy’, ‘pluralism’ and ‘tolerance’ to justify their cooperation – which is presented as comprehensive and multi-sectoral – but ultimately emphasize trade and investment liberalization. It is a relationship based on the notion of ‘friendship’ and it certainly has not been moving towards a relationship that could be characterized as ‘enmity’ or ‘rivalry’. Nevertheless, it is a relationship that has not been improving in terms of increasing mutual trust and has been losing momentum for not achieving visible tangible results in the area that is taken by the parties as the core of their ‘strategic partnership’. It is a very particular ‘strategic partnership’, which presents some similarities with the EU-Brazil and EU-China strategic partnerships, but like the others is *sui generis*.

## 9.2 Understanding the Uses of ‘Strategic Partnership’ by the EU and its Implications for Agency and Policy

The European Union is a complex foreign policy actor. It is complex due to its *sui generis* nature as a political entity. This leads to a very particular process of external policy framing in terms of principles and interests. This has important consequences for policy conceptualization and implementation, and it certainly has an impact on how these policies are perceived, analyzed and evaluated by European and global audiences. The case studies conducted from Chapters 5 to 8 showed that there are particular uses of language and elements in many of the EU’s strategic partnerships with the BRIC countries, which are similar. To some extent they are indeed part of some sort of EU ‘strategic partnership’ policy strategy but if one takes a look at how these individual relationships are conceptualized, framed and conducted, they reveal a dynamics of their own.

To talk about a single ‘meaning’ of ‘strategic partnership’ that could be drawn from the case studies conducted, would ignore the complexity of this expression in the vocabulary of the relationships developed between the EU and the BRIC countries. Nevertheless, by treating ‘strategic partnership’ as a speech act with performative functions, there are functions associated with the enunciation of these words that can be to some extent categorized. The first of these functions is that of ‘label’. It is important to stress that once the European Union declared in its *European Security Strategy* (2003) its goal of establishing ‘strategic partnerships’ with those key actors in the international society that could help it in its mission to consolidate effective multilateralism, the label or status of ‘EU’s strategic partner’ became a desired commodity for those international political actors willing to be acknowledged as global players. That means that Russia, Brazil, China and India, all in accordance with their respective foreign policy strategies, were eager to hold or to acquire the status of EU ‘strategic partner’. For the EU, that was very meaningful, because the ambition of other international political actors to receive the label of ‘EU’s strategic partner’ meant that these potential global players recognized the EU as an international political actor with the legitimacy to provide them with the label or nomenclature that would make them to be acknowledged as actors with a different status in the system. It reinforced the recognition of the EU as an actor with a higher status and member of the ‘core’ of the global international society. Thus, the use of ‘strategic partnership’ as a label that demarcated those actors perceived by the EU as relevant for the whole configuration of the system is also linked to the normative function of ‘strategic partnership’.

In Chapter 4 I argued that the EU sees itself as a messianic actor and a ‘norm entrepreneur’. ‘Strategic partnership’ is framed in its foreign policy strategy as a concept that

can be mobilized to push for the communication and internalization of a particular set of values and of the norm of 'effective multilateralism'. It is directly related to the EU's 'structural foreign policy'. In the cases of EU-Brazil and EU-India relations, the focus was not as much on 'democracy', 'human rights', 'rule of law', since they were taken by the parties as 'shared values'. Instead, the focus was on 'effective multilateralism', which was a concept accepted by all of them but understood to some extent in different terms. On the other hand, in the cases of EU-Russia and EU-China, the normative function of 'strategic partnership' was more complex. Russia and China are countries perceived as problematic in the context of sharing notions of 'democracy', 'human rights' and 'rule of law'. Furthermore, these two international political actors were known for implementing foreign policies that systematically opposed EU foreign policy. They were challenging and sensitive partners and the EU was in need for a foreign policy approach towards these countries that could be appealing for all those involved. 'Strategic partnership' became thus the language that embodied this approach. The notion of 'equality' and other principles observed in the process of framing of these two 'strategic partnerships', in association with the status provided by the 'strategic partnership' label, were attractive enough to be accepted by the Russian and Chinese governments. They were the operationalization of the 'pragmatic move' made by the EU to engage with China and Russia on the basis of 'mutual benefit', while creating a channel to carefully advance a structural foreign policy.

The third function of the use of 'strategic partnership' is the constitution of the rules of the relationships between the EU and each one of its strategic partners. In terms of agenda and shared goals, the analyses conducted from chapter 5 to 8 showed that all of the EU's strategic partnerships with the BRIC countries are broad, comprehensive and multi-sectoral. There are obvious 'shared goals' observed in all of the relationships discussed in this thesis. However, it cannot be argued that all of the EU's 'strategic partnerships' are based on the same goals and that all of the areas included in the agenda are the same. The 'strategic partnerships' analyzed here show that each 'strategic partnership' is comprehensive to a different extent. But more important than knowing how many ministerial or sectoral dialogues have been created and are being conducted in the framework of each EU 'strategic partnership'<sup>193</sup> it is important to stress the fact that the relevance and focus on some goals is not the same and can change in each relationship. There is no set of goals that defines a 'true strategic partnership'. If cooperation in

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<sup>193</sup> For information about the institutional channels established by the EU with Russia, Brazil, China and India in the framework of each strategic partnership, see the data compilation made available by the European Strategic Partnerships Observatory at <<http://strategicpartnerships.eu/>>.

security was to be taken as *condition sine qua non* in a ‘strategic partnership’ the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’ would not have been framed as such in 2007. Scientific cooperation is a very developed area of the EU-India ‘strategic partnership’ but the area considered to be the most relevant is trade and investment. Trade and investment is in fact a topic in the agenda of all the EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’. But how the cooperation in this area affects the further development of each ‘strategic partnership’ is very different. Whereas it appears as a central topic in the agendas developed by the EU with Brazil and India, this area is constantly eclipsed by other topics in the agendas developed by the EU with Russia and China. That does not mean that this area is not essential in the ‘strategic partnerships’ with Russia and China. Yet it is important to note that despite the very positive results in trade between the EU and China and between the EU and Russia, the legitimacy of these relationships is not guaranteed since disagreements in other areas put into question the acknowledgement of these relationships as ‘true strategic partnerships’.

The analyses of the processes of constitution and development of the ‘strategic partnerships’ between the EU and the BRIC countries also showed that ‘strategic partnership’ can establish very different relationships in terms of asymmetry and hierarchy between partners. Even the principle of ‘equality’ is evoked differently in the conversational histories of the ‘strategic partnerships’ analyzed. In the ‘strategic partnerships’ with China and Russia it is one of the most important constitutive rules of the relationship but it is not a claim constantly made by the Brazilian authorities. That does not mean that the Brazilian government would be in favor of a relationship openly presented as asymmetrical. It rests its confidence on the notion of ‘friendship’ acknowledged by both sides, which in the common understanding of the parties assumes that the relationship should be balanced. Indeed, the recognition of the ‘growing relevance of Brazil’ and its characterization as a global and regional leader naturally drove the relationship to a less asymmetrical configuration.

On the other hand, the dynamics observed in the other relationships analyzed are also very particular. The EU-China ‘strategic partnership’, for example, was initiated in a context of low mutual trust. For China the principles of ‘equality’, ‘mutual benefit’ and ‘complementarity’ were at the core of the understanding that the parties should have about their relationship. Thus it was a relationship that was initiated in balanced terms and due to the difficulty in conducting acts of repositioning has not experienced many changes in this sense. This can be contrasted with the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’, which was established in the context of a very tense common ground as an asymmetrical relationship in which EU representatives were openly directive, but which by means of repositionings was reframed in a long process that led to an

equitable relationship. Finally, the India-EU ‘strategic partnership’ should be mentioned. It stressed from the start the notion of ‘equality’ but one in which one of the partners – the EU – frequently makes use of directive language. The Indian government would later on impose itself more starkly – as it can be seen by the denial to agree with the broad-based trade and investment agreement desired by the EU – but the reduction of asymmetries in EU-India relations were still not translated into complete equality.

‘Strategic partnership’ acquires also a constitutive function in terms of shared values and dynamics of rivalry and friendship. I argued in Chapter 3 that strategic partners must share at least a basic set of values that will make them identify at least one single common goal upon which they will be able to justify their cooperation. ‘Strategic partnership’ is framed in association with the notion of ‘cooperation’. The notion of ‘enmity’ is directly opposed to the idea of ‘cooperation’. Thus whereas a ‘strategic partnership’ will not be held by enemies, there is no reason why it must be established by ‘friends’. ‘Cooperation’ can indeed take place between rivals under some circumstances. In any case, references to ‘friendship’ are present in all of the conversational histories analyzed in this thesis. In all of the case studies ‘friendship’ is used both to justify the establishment of a ‘strategic partnership’ and to serve as evidence that the parties are following rules of behavior that demonstrate their commitment to the notion of ‘strategic partnership’. The same occurs to some extent with the references to shared values. With exception of the EU-China ‘strategic partnership’ all of the other relationships analyzed are constituted with reference to the values of ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights’. The fact that China is an exception, shows that a ‘strategic partnership’ must not necessarily be based on these principles and this is important because it opposes the claim that a ‘gap of values’ denies the possibility of establishment of a ‘true strategic partnership’. Therein it is not to be inferred that incompatibilities in terms of values will not hinder cooperation and the deepening of a bilateral relationship. However, it is also not valid to say that the EU and Russia will never be able to have a ‘true strategic partnership’ because the different understanding that the parties have about the concepts of ‘democracy’ and even ‘friendship’ are different. In reference to Chapter 7, it could be also seen that Chinese and EU officials have a different understanding about what ‘friendly relations’ entail, but this is no reason to argue that under such conditions EU and China do not have a relationship that might be framed as ‘strategic partnership’.

In any case, the examples analyzed illustrate that some of the EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’ are criticized or are under stress, yet this is understandable. The problem is not that a ‘strategic partnership’ can be established just between friends. The challenge lies in the fact that the EU and the BRIC countries propose notions of ‘friendship’ as part of the

constitutive framework of their relationships and, since the behavior of the parties not always resembles what would be accounted for ‘friendly behavior’, this undermines the legitimacy of some relationships – e.g. the EU-Russia and EU-China ‘strategic partnerships’. Furthermore it becomes an important obstacle in attempts at increasing mutual trust.

The question remains though if the enunciation of ‘strategic partnership’ has a constitutive impact in terms of increasing value-sharing and making relationships move from ‘rivalry’ to ‘friendship’. Before addressing this issue I recall a discussion on ‘degrees of solidarity’ conducted in Chapter 2. According to Buzan, international societies can be ‘thin’ or ‘thick’, where a ‘thick’ international society is characterized by a wide range of shared values and by being constituted by rules which transcend mere coexistence and lead to the pursuit of joint gains and management of collective problems in a range of issue areas. In this context, the establishment of ‘strategic partnerships’ based on ‘comprehensive cooperation’, ‘shared values’ and bilateral dialogue shows that there is a global international society which is not completely based on pluralism but has a consistent degree of ‘thickness’. But how thick is it? The way the EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’ are framed show that it could be thicker, that there is some degree of value-sharing and that it could be improved. In any case, the establishment by the EU of a number of ‘strategic partnerships’ is evidence that there is a supportive environment for cooperative relationships, whereas, at least in theory, the consolidation and deepening of EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’ could be helping to make the international society thicker. There is some sort of functionalist co-constitutive dynamic between the different degrees of solidarity of the international society and the establishment and development of the EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’.

As I discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, the use of ‘strategic partnership’ by the European Union can be seen as part of a structural foreign policy that aims at expanding the core values of the European international society and make the global international society thicker. The ‘pragmatic move’ follows the logic of the approach described by Fierke (2002, 2007) as the ‘acting as if’. And in fact the analyses carried out in Chapters 5 to 8 show that through the language of ‘strategic partnership’ the EU has been able to establish a concrete institutional framework to sustain dialogue and cooperate with challenging partners like China and Russia on a regular basis. The problem is that whereas the language of ‘strategic partnership’ allowed a cooperative institutional framework to be framed, giving a window of action for the EU structural foreign policy to operate, it also created conditions for the EU’s strategy partners to establish exactly the framework of cooperation that maximizes their interest. The latter allows them to advance cooperation in particular areas of interest while containing EU’s efforts to push



its own values of ‘democracy’, ‘human rights’ and ‘rule of law’. ‘Strategic partnership’ can thus be seen both as the framework concept of a normative and constitutive European foreign policy and as an instrument to guarantee normative containment by actors like China and Russia. In this context, the discussion must be had about the constitutive function of ‘strategic partnership’ for agency, increase in mutual trust and ultimately about the results of the establishment of strategic partnerships by the EU as an external policy approach.

It is no coincidence that enunciations and discussions about the existence or the necessity to build a ‘true strategic partnership’ can be observed exactly in the context of those ‘strategic partnerships’ in which the parties have a lower degree of mutual trust. The problem with most discussions and analyses on the success of individual ‘strategic partnerships’ state that some relationships cannot be characterized as ‘strategic partnership’ and start from the assumption that ‘strategic partnership’ is a form of association between some sort of international political actors. The association is supposedly based on a set of basic principles and rules, which, if not respected, show that the relationship in case does not fulfill the basic conditions to be defined as ‘strategic partnership’. That means that any further enunciations to label the relationship as such should be taken as mere empty political rhetoric.

The analyses of the EU-Russia, EU-Brazil, EU-China and EU-India strategic partnerships showed that each one of these relationships is framed differently. ‘Strategic partnership’ means something different as a framework of association and cooperation in each one of these bilateral contexts. Even the EU, which is the common denominator in all of these case studies, demonstrates that to some extent it has multiple ‘personas’<sup>194</sup> and behaves differently in each ‘strategic partnership’ in which it participates. In this context, the criteria to assess success must be different. It is not the ‘gap of values’ in itself that makes the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’ to be doomed. It is certainly a hard argument to be made taking into consideration that this thesis is being finalized after the beginning of hostilities between Russia and the EU as a consequence of the diplomatic crisis between Russia and the Ukraine that started in the end of 2013, escalated into a territorial and military conflict in the beginning of 2014, and remains unsolved. This episode initiated such a big crisis between the EU and Russia that even the current High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, said in November 2014 that ‘Russia stays a strategic player in the regional and global challenges, [regardless if] we like it or not, but I don’t think it’s a strategic partner

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<sup>194</sup> Here I am making reference to the notion of multiple personas presented by Harré and Langenhovner (1999) discussed in Chapter 1.

anymore'.<sup>195</sup> However, even this crisis is no evidence that the EU and Russia was not a 'real strategic partnership' in the period analyzed in Chapter 5. It is evidence that at some later point in time divergent interests emerged, which led to major disagreements and hostile practices and thus to an important crisis that might have put an end to this 'strategic partnership'.

In any case, if I take into consideration only the period analyzed in Chapter 5 the question arises: did 'strategic partnership' have tangible constitutive effects in the relationship between Russia and the EU? Were there consequences for agency? I discussed in Chapter 5 that the use of 'strategic partnership' by EU and Russia to frame their bilateral relationship is informed by a tense common ground. In fact, during all the phases of the relationship one can see that some dichotomies like 'trust x distrust' or 'convergence x divergence' had an important influence in the dialogue between EU and Russian representatives and in the perceptions of the European and Russian audiences. This is an aspect that cannot be ignored and helps us to understand the process of reconfiguration of the meaning of 'strategic partnership' in this bilateral context and the repositionings that made the relationship move into a less asymmetrical and more balanced configuration. If one takes the principles of engagement of the EU-Russia 'strategic partnership' pointed out in Table 1 and recalls the discussion conducted in Chapter 5, it will be seen that the principles of 'equality', 'mutual respect of differences', 'tactical differences', 'pragmatism' will have an ever stronger influence on how the relationship is understood by the parties and on their possibilities of agency. It is undeniable that Russian repositionings and the re-framing of the rules of the relationship by this party limited EU's agency. That does not mean that the relationship became less of a 'strategic partnership' but that the common understanding of the parties regarding what a 'strategic partnership' should entail was transformed. This is by no means a judgment in favor of the kind of relationship that the EU-Russia now had. It is simply a conclusion drawn from the observation that the Russian government tried to change the rules of the relationship and succeeded in its efforts. It is important to stress that the EU representatives accepted this. They could have just interrupted any form of cooperation with Russia in face of some of the many episodes of disagreement and crisis that took place in the 2000s. But they did not do that. In turn, they agreed to accept a different relationship, one in which cooperation could still be implemented in some important areas and a channel of communication kept open. EU's agency was limited but it has changed in positive aspects. It would have been much better if the war between Russia and Georgia had not taken place in August 2008. However, it cannot be denied that the role played by EU

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<sup>195</sup> Mogherini: *Russia is no longer the EU's strategic partner*, <<http://www.euractiv.com/sections/global-europe/mogherini-russia-no-longer-eus-strategic-partner-308152>>, accessed 5 November 2014.

representatives in the mediation of the crisis was decisive. The outcome, with the recognition of sovereignty of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by the Russian government was not positive from the perspective of EU representatives, but at least EU and Russia followed the rule they had agreed upon: ‘we discuss issues, frankly and constructively, including topics where our views may diverge, and we try to find a common ground’. It is very important to make the distinction between the breaking of the rules and the fulfillment of the goals of the ‘strategic partnership’. In addition, it is important to recall how the language of ‘strategic partnership’ allowed the parties to quickly recover from major crisis episodes and normalize their relations.

Some of the goals of the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’ like the ‘end of the dividing lines in Europe’ or the development of a more reliable partnership were not fully achieved. In this sense, no one could argue that this relationship was completely successful. However, as I discussed in Chapter 5, one should also not ignore some examples of success obtained in the framework of the ‘strategic partnership’ like the increase in bilateral trade, which was a common goal of the parties. One should not forget that within the framework of the ‘strategic partnership’ the EU was able to complete the accession of the Baltic Countries and expand NATO’s frontier to the Russian border. Most of the EU Member States recognized Kosovo’s independence. All of this occurred despite the opposition of the Russian government but did not lead to any military conflict. Despite the remaining mistrust, most of EU Member States and members of NATO maintained a low level of military spending in the last decade.<sup>196</sup> Many of EU’s member states did not have the perception that they had a potential threat in their backyard.

Whereas it must be recognized that the EU-Russia ‘strategic partnership’ was not successful as a policy framework in building mutual trust between Russia and the EU, and thus failed to fulfill one of its main goals, it allowed the parties to play the bilateral game according to mutually agreed rules. It established an institutional framework that allowed the parties to achieve progress in some areas and to deal with problems through dialogue. It was certainly not as a rewarding policy as EU foreign policy-makers were hoping for but it did achieve some results. It had some implications for agency. As it was argued in Chapter 5 it cannot be forgotten that more than an assertive speech act, ‘the EU and Russia are strategic partners’ is an important discourse that challenges a very strong perception held by European and Russian audiences, one that argues that positive cooperation between the EU and Russia is not possible. This

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<sup>196</sup> See *Financial and Economic Data Relating to NATO Defence* (PR/CP(2014)028), NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 24 February 2014, <[http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static/assets/pdf/pdf\\_topics/20140224\\_140224-PR2014-028-Defence-exp.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_topics/20140224_140224-PR2014-028-Defence-exp.pdf)>.

perception is based on a strong discourse that is drawn from the Cold War common ground and focuses especially on the ‘gap of values’ and on the supposed ‘incompatibilities’ between these international political actors. It is a dangerous discourse, which representatives of some European Institutions, like the European Commission, have been making a strong effort to neutralize using the language of ‘strategic partnership’.

How one evaluates the success of the EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’ is thus a very complex issue. By looking at the EU-China ‘strategic partnership’, from one side it is clear how ‘comprehensive’ this relationship became, on the other hand, one sees a dialogue on human rights that, after twenty years, has not delivered much. If one takes the EU-Brazil ‘strategic partnership’ indeed one cannot speak of any major crisis. Relations are in fact friendly. Trade relations progress well. However the parties still cannot make the ‘strategic partnership’ translate into an agreement on the EU-Mercosur association agreement. They did not manage to find common positions on many issues of the global international agenda; they fight in different sides at WTO negotiations and discussions about the reform of the International Monetary Fund. The Indian case is similar. The ‘strategic partnership’ was established, cooperation is taking place, but on sensitive issues like the Broad Based Trade and Investment Agreement, one cannot state that much progress has taken place.

It is not very easy to evaluate the success of the EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’ because whereas some common goals have not been achieved by the parties, that has been happening exactly due to the constitutive rules agreed upon by the parties in a process characterized by a number of language games and acts of positioning. When the parties agree on rules like ‘consultation on equal basis’ or on the notion that disagreements are inherent to the relationship between strategic partners, it creates the conditions for processes of negotiation that can last for a long time.

The case-studies presented in this thesis demonstrate that not all of the EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’ are balanced relationships between equals, but all of the relationships have been progressing towards more equality. In theory, the EU’s strategy to establish ‘strategic partnerships’ with the BRIC countries makes sense. It created an important channel of communication and cooperation through which the bilateral relationships with important actors of the global international society could be diversified and deepened. The challenge lies still in the normative dimension of this strategy from a European perspective, i.e. to implement the structural foreign policy and consolidate effective multilateralism. The fact that even with Brazil, a strategic partner with which there is a high degree of value-sharing, the EU was not able to promote convergence on topics of the international agenda shows that the results from

the point of view of the EU foreign policy were very limited. The EU's 'strategic partnerships' are changing into relationships in which it becomes progressively more difficult for the EU to be 'directive' and advance a normative foreign policy. In turn, the process of change into more commitment-based relationships benefits the governments of the BRIC countries, which see themselves in a better position to sustain its policies and change the terms of engagement with the EU.

Hence, it could be said that the EU's 'strategic partnerships' have been working more for the BRIC countries than for the EU. From a systemic perspective, the fact that there is a comprehensive cooperative relationship between the EU and these countries protects the global international society from becoming 'thinner', but there are no signs to argue that it is making it 'thicker'.

### **9.3 Implications for Understanding 'Strategic Partnership' in International Politics**

This thesis demonstrated that the European Union's 'strategic partnerships' are frameworks of cooperation, which follow particular processes of constitutions and change. 'Strategic partnership' in the context of EU-China relations does not mean the same as in the EU-Brazil relationship. However, although the acts performed by the parties involved are not exactly the same, there are three functions of the use of 'strategic partnership' that could be observed in all the relationships between the EU and the BRIC countries examined in this thesis: label, normative and constitutive. 'Strategic partnership' is not an expression with a stable meaning in the vocabulary of foreign policy instruments of the European Union foreign policy, but it is turning into an important foreign policy concept for the EU.

In Chapter 3 it was argued that there has been an increase in the usage of this expression in the vocabulary of international politics. More and more relationships are being framed as such and one simple way to make sense of this phenomenon could be simply to take it as the manifestation of empty political rhetoric or as the banalization of an expression. The analyses of the relationships conducted between the EU and the BRIC countries in Chapters 5 to 8 have shown that 'strategic partnership' is a fluid concept. 'Rhetoric' is part of discourse and of political linguistic practice, but the recognition of its existence does not imply that it is not meaningful. The assumption that 'strategic partnership' is a descriptive concept with fixed properties and a single definition reduces most relationships established as such to the category of 'empty political rhetoric' or of relationships which are not 'true' 'strategic partnerships'. The

EU's 'strategic partnerships' show that this is not the case. Language and meaning are more complex than that.

The EU's 'strategic partnerships' with the BRIC countries illustrate that although 'strategic partnership' is becoming a foreign policy concept in the vocabulary of instruments available to EU foreign policy-makers, it frames relationships that follow different constitutive rules. Relationships based on different common grounds, principles, degrees of value-sharing, agendas, and internal logics in terms of the hierarchy between the parties. They are all cooperative relationships but are based on a different constitutive framework and thus evolve differently. That turns 'strategic partnership' into an important joker in international politics; a joker that the EU has been trying to use with the aim to make its foreign policy strategy operational. It is important to notice that the same can be done and is being done by other international political actors.

Does that imply that everything goes and that the concept of 'strategic partnership' can be used without any criteria? No, this is not the argument of this thesis. The discussion must be carried out in other terms. I claim that 'strategic partnership' is a language that allows international political actors to act upon each other, to constitute a framework of bilateral interaction without fixating their terms of engagement. It can be a relationship that focuses on trade, on security, on political dialogue, or all of the above. It shows that strategic partners are engaged in cooperation. But how this framework of cooperation is constituted can be changed by those involved according to the change in circumstances, to the identification of new common interests, to the necessity to modify the rules of the game. And any change will be communicated and internalized within a process of linguistic engagement. 'Strategic partnership' may sound like a very pragmatic expression based on clear strategic goals, but it can be an important instrument for change both on the level of bilateral interaction and on the systemic level.

The EU's 'strategic partnerships' assume that the 'acting as if' is possible. Interaction and socialization between strategic partners should allow normative change between partners and thus support the internalization of particular sets of norms through a process of 'norm cascade' that would eventually lead to systemic change. Even if the EU was still not able to defeat mistrust and to promote full convergence with countries like Russia and China towards reaching a common understanding on notions of 'democracy' and 'human rights', it showed that, through the language of 'strategic partnership', meaningful cooperation is possible even in scenarios where mutual trust is lacking and disagreements often occur. And this by itself has important implications for the consolidation of the global international society.

One of the most important conclusions drawn from the case studies is that more important than the two words – ‘strategic’ and ‘partnership’ – combined together the use of language is fundamental. This entire thesis has focused on the term ‘strategic partnership’. But are there differences between a ‘strategic partnership’, a ‘special relationship’, or a ‘privileged relationship’? I argued that differences in meaning emerge from the different uses that are made from each one of these expressions in the talk of international politics. To understand how meaning is created and changed there is no other way than to look at ‘language in use’. To assess other meanings and functions of ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics, the conversational histories of other relationships framed as ‘strategic partnership’ must be discussed.

It is important to stress that as the new ‘joker’ in the language of international politics, ‘strategic partnership’ is turning into a foreign policy concept of other international political actors that are active in the global international society. When I say that this expression has turned into a ‘foreign policy concept’, I mean that the use of this expression is being integrated and consolidate within the ‘foreign policy framework’ of multiple actors with different degrees of internalization and relevance. It is commonly known that the European Union and the US make a consistent use of this expression to frame a number of bilateral relationships. As these and other international political actors establish ‘strategic partnerships’ with other actors in the system, this terminology is used by their partners, which then establish ‘strategic partnerships’ with other actors and increase the relevance of this term. As this expression is spread around the globe, different uses are made of it in the process of establishing the constitutive framework of bilateral relationships. All the BRIC countries have been making use of this expression as a framework for other relationships, which can be very different from the relationships they have been developing with the EU. As I mentioned in Chapter 8, the ‘strategic partnerships’ between the EU and India on the one hand and India and US on the other hand, are an important case in point.

‘Strategic partnership’ is thus becoming not a single but multiple foreign policy concepts in international politics. This presents important implications for a discussion on agency in international politics. Agency is normally associated with the realm of practices. The case studies analyzed did not argue against the role of practices as a constitutive element in bilateral relationships. But by incorporating the assumptions of ‘language in use’ approaches an extended understanding of agency was presented, which assumes that language and practices cannot be dissociated from each other. Language is performance; it is action; it is a constitutive element of agency. The relevance of the use of ‘strategic partnership’ by international political

actors should thus not be neglected and ignored. It is undeniable that some practices in the narrow sense might have a much larger impact than thousands of words have on the perception the audience has concerning the framework of a given relationship between international political actors. However, the change in language, by itself is already extremely meaningful. Certainly, representatives of governments and politicians do sometimes pay lip service. This is part of political practice. But another different thing is to assume that everything is said and done is part of a big empty theatre designed by 'realist' minds to deceive and conquer. When representatives of the EU and of a given BRIC country jointly frame their relationship as a 'strategic partnership', they are acting. And by means of these linguistic acts they have established a constitutive framework for their bilateral engagement. It might happen that at some point one of the parties will want to change some of the rules of engagement. It can happen that one of them will act against these rules with practices that will be perceived by the other strategic partner as a betrayal of the 'spirit of strategic partnership'. But this 'act of aggression' will be coded as the break of a rule, which will or will not be taken as the end line of the 'strategic partnership' by those involved, according to the very own constitutive framework of the relationship in case. Again, what is essential is not to start from a misconceived understanding of what a 'strategic partnership' is and what it entails, because this affects the evaluations that are made by analysts and by the very own policy-makers involved about the achievements of the 'strategic partnership'. Unfortunately, the authors mentioned in Chapter 3 are trying to define the basic elements that should be present in a 'strategic partnership' and contribute to a negative reading of many bilateral relationships currently being developed in the international realm. And by doing this they are reinforcing what Guzzini (1998) calls the 'realist mind-set' in international relations.

It is essential that political analysts and foreign policy-makers have the possibility to assess relationships framed as 'strategic partnership' and might discuss what the real challenges are, what can be improved, what is being delivered. However, the degree of 'success' of these relationships should not be evaluated according to pre-conceived understandings about what these relationships must achieve and demonstrate. Political analysis should not be based on realist premises or on idealist expectations, but should be informed. 'Success' must be evaluated according to the bilateral framework agreed by the strategic partners. And this can only be done with a look at 'language' and 'processes'.

In any case, it is important to note that 'strategic partnership' emerged in the talk of international politics due to the necessity found by foreign policy-makers to deal with the lack of mutual trust among the international political actors that integrate the global international



society. It is the by-product of a 'thin' international society, which might have the potential to transform the way actors interact and increase the degree of solidarity in the system. Unfortunately, the case studies conducted in Chapters 5 to 8 showed that the 'strategic partnerships' between the EU and the BRIC countries have demonstrated a low degree of effectiveness in this sense. This is, however, connected to false expectations of the audience regarding the results of each one of these 'strategic partnerships'. 'Mutual trust' is connected to perceptions of the intentions of the 'other'. The lack of understanding about the constitutive framework of these 'strategic partnerships' has been leading to constant negative evaluations about the success of these relationships. This has negatively affected the perceptions of the whole audience, including foreign policy-makers, about the use of this foreign policy concept. In this context, it is extremely challenging to increase mutual trust through the language of 'strategic partnership' as long as there is no theoretical framework that helps analysts and foreign policy-makers to understand the rules of engagement and develop strategies to overcome mistrust. The present thesis offered such a theoretical framework and hopefully will be just the first step in an effort to increase our understanding of the uses of 'strategic partnership' in international politics.

#### **9.4 Implications for Theory and Further Research**

This thesis argued that from an ontological and epistemological perspective, there was a need to problematize the concept of 'strategic partnerships' in international politics. The academic discussion is not exhaustive. Furthermore, other contributions found in the think-tank and policy oriented literature have insisted on the stabilization of the meaning of 'strategic partnership', treating it as form of association characterized by a set of properties and struggling to elaborate a comprehensive definition for this expression. By drawing on the language-based assumptions from the Philosophy of Language and Pragmatics discussed in Chapter 1, a new approach to understand the meaning(s) of 'strategic partnership' in international politics – as a speech act – has started to emerge.

It was not the first time 'language in use' approaches were used as an ontological and epistemological reference to analyzes of international political phenomena. However, this is the first attempt at combining assumptions from the Philosophy of Language, Social Psychology and International Relations Theory into a coherent pluralistic framework to assess the uses and meanings of 'strategic partnership' in international politics.

Philosophy of Language and Pragmatics offered the ontological and epistemological premises to claim for a different approach capable of sustaining a new perspective in terms of ontology, agency and meaning in international politics. Positioning Theory presented the methodological support to make an empirical and analytical discussion possible. Finally, the English School contributed with a theoretical framework to international politics that allowed the link between the systemic level of analysis and the level of interaction between units.

This two-level approach was essential for a discussion on the meaning(s) of ‘strategic partnership’ because the constitution of meaning on the level of bilateral interaction is not independent from systemic constraints. It is part of a co-constitutive relationship. Cooperative interaction is only possible when agents share the view that through common institutions they are able to solve problems of coordination and collaboration, i.e. when they are part of an international society. It is the shared belief that a set of norms constitutes an international society that creates the condition of possibility of bilateral engagement, of dialogue, i.e. of framing ‘strategic partnerships’. In the case of the EU’s ‘strategic partnerships’ this is even more important, because the EU structural foreign policy approach internalizes the assumption of existence of a global international society almost as a ‘thinner’ extension of the European International Society. To analyze the uses and functions – and ultimately assess the meaning – of ‘strategic partnership’ in each bilateral engagement sustained between the EU and Russia, Brazil, China and India, the process of framing and constitution of the EU foreign policy could not be neglected. In this context, a theoretical framework was needed which transcended the scope of bilateral interaction.

By establishing a framework to assess the uses and functions of ‘strategic partnership’, this thesis not only presented a framework to discuss the implications of language in use for agency and policy, but also opened up an important venue of theoretical research: the incorporation of the linguistic turn into the English School of International Relations. As it was discussed in Chapter 2, the compatibilities between some social constructivist approaches and some accounts identified as part of the English School have already been pointed out in the literature. Theorists justify the English School’s history-based epistemology and its focus on processes and change as the theoretical bridge with social constructivist approaches. I demonstrated that a concept like ‘international society’ can be integrated into a language-based analytical framework to address a concrete discussion in international politics. In this context, a discussion on the concept of ‘strategic partnership’ became the first stage for further empirical research and theoretical discussion on the analytical function of language within the English School theoretical framework.

Leaving the realm of theory and returning to the practical discussion on the meaning(s) of ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics, it must be said that the goal of this thesis was to problematize a relevant issue on the contemporary global international agenda. It focused on the uses made by the EU of the concept of ‘strategic partnership’ but it has just started to shed light on the functions and meanings of ‘strategic partnership’ in international politics. More empirical research is necessary. Further discussion and analysis is needed on how other international political actors conceptualize, frame and make sense of this concept.<sup>197</sup> Hopefully the language-based framework developed here will inspire further research and academic discussion aimed at increasing our understanding of ‘strategic partnership’ and of other political concepts used by international political actors.

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<sup>197</sup> Hamilton (2014) provides an interesting discussion on the vocabulary of relationships of the US by focusing on the differentiation between ‘strategic partnership’ and ‘strategic dialogue’.

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