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# Bridging the Capability–Expectations Gap? An Analysis of the New Dynamics in the EU's Security Strategy Towards Asia

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*The past decade has witnessed a significant shift in the EU's foreign and security policy towards Asia, especially following the Union's 'pivot to Asia' in 2012. In 2018, the adoption of the Council conclusions on enhanced EU security cooperation in and with Asia denotes the Union's ambition to increase its security and geopolitical leverage and visibility in Asia. Against this backdrop, this paper aims to examine the new dynamics and main characteristics of the EU's recent security-related policies and activities in East Asia by drawing on the concept of the capability–expectations gap. Using this concept, this paper seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the EU's capabilities in its relations with Asia, as well as EU internal actors' and Asian actors' expectations about the Union's role in Asian security affairs.*

***Keywords:*** EU Foreign and Security Policy, EU-Asia Relations, the Capabiity-Expectation Gap

## I. INTRODUCTION

The past decade has witnessed a significant shift in the EU's foreign and security policy towards Asia, especially following the Union's 'pivot to Asia' in 2012. Although many European states developed close links with Asia in colonial times, the EU is a relatively new player in the region because it only developed significant ties with Asia in the last two decades

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(Song and Wang, 2019). Despite many security interests in Asia, the EU is frequently considered to have a limited role and impact in security-related matters in the region because it has no significant military forces, especially in comparison to the US.

However, in recent years the situation has started to change. On the one hand, the EU has taken ambitious steps to strengthen internal cooperation in security and defence, such as by establishing Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European defence industrial development programme (EDIDP). On the other hand, the EU is committed to acting as a global security provider beyond its immediate borders (EEAS, 2016), with a strong intention to deepen its security ties with Asian states. In May 2018, the Council adopted conclusions on enhanced EU security cooperation in and with Asia, calling for 'tailor-made cooperation' between the EU and Asian partners (Council of the European Union, 2018). The Commission and the High Representative also published a document, 'Connecting Europe and Asia—building blocks for an EU Strategy' (European Commission, 2018), which lays a foundation for the EU's connectivity strategy and explicitly emphasized that connectivity and security should go hand in hand. These newly published EU policy papers denote the EU's ambition to increase its geopolitical and security leverage and visibility in Asia.

As a result, in both academic and policy circles, increased attention has been paid to the EU's security-related efforts in Asia. While some scholars have examined the EU's promotion of regional security and conflict transformation (Beeson and Diez, 2018) in Asia, others have investigated how Asian states view the EU's peace and security narrative (Chaban et al., 2017). A growing volume of literature also explores the EU's security-related policies and activities in the Asian region with an emphasis on precise issue areas or in specific countries (e.g. Maier-Knapp, 2014). Nevertheless, some important questions remain underexplored. What are the structural factors that have shaped the EU's recent security policies towards Asia? How should the Union's capabilities in the context of EU–Asia security relations be evaluated? Moreover, does the EU have the capabilities to fulfill its growing ambition to become a security provider in the Asian region?

In order to shed a new light on these questions, this paper examines the main characteristics of the EU's recent security-related policies and activities in East Asia by drawing on the concept of the capability–expectations gap (CEG) (Hill, 1993, 1998). Using this concept, this paper seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the EU's capabilities (resources, cohesiveness and instruments) in the security domain as well as EU internal actors' and Asian actors' expectations about the Union's role in Asian se-

curity affairs. Whereas there exist various studies dedicated to analyzing the EU's overarching (security) relations with Asia in recent years (e.g. Song and Wang, 2019), this article departs from these existing studies in at least two aspects. First, as will be discussed in section III, this article revisits the conventional concept of Capabilities–Expectations Gaps (Hill, 1993, 1998) and adopts this framework to study EU-Asia security relations in a relatively new way. Specifically, instead of focusing on the 'expectation' side which was discussed by the existing literature on CEG and EU-Asia relations (e.g. Wong, 2012), our analysis takes into consideration both capabilities and expectations when analyzing the EU's security engagement in Asia. Second, this paper attaches a greater importance to various newly emerging security-related issue areas such as connectivity, maritime security and cybersecurity in order to offer a timely reflection on the EU's changing priorities in its security strategy towards Asia.

The main observation of this research is that the EU has made considerable efforts to elevate its security profile in Asia by increasing its resources, enhancing its ability to agree on a more holistic security approach towards Asia, and diversifying the instruments to deepen security cooperation with Asian partners at bilateral, interregional and multilateral levels. Nevertheless, the EU's effectiveness in bridging this CEG in the context of EU–Asia relations has been constrained by both internal and external expectations: while the EU has established an over-ambitious objective to become a security provider in the Asian region, the perceptions of key Asian actors reveals that the Union is still regarded as a marginal security actor in the region, despite an increasing level of recognition among Asian states in terms of the EU's contribution in certain functional and soft security domains.

Beyond this introduction, the article is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the structural factors affecting EU security strategies in Asia, which sets the scene for the subsequent analysis of EU security engagement in the region. The second section provides an analytical framework drawing on the concept of CEG. The third section applies the CEG framework to EU–Asia security relations. It examines the EU's resources, cohesiveness and instruments in the context of EU–Asia security cooperation and follows this with a discussion of internal and external expectations about the EU's role as a security actor in the region. The final section summarizes the article and provides a conclusion.

## II. SETTING THE SCENE: STRUCTURAL FACTORS SHAPING THE EU'S SECURITY STRATEGY TOWARDS ASIA

EU–Asia security relations do not take place in a vacuum, but are af-

fected by third parties' actions in Asia and embedded in an evolving global context. An analysis of EU–Asia security relations must therefore take into account these underlying factors. This article pays special attention to two factors: the US military presence in Asia and the increasing significance of non-traditional security (NTS) issues. The following is a brief account of how these factors interact with EU–Asia security relations.

## 1. The Role of the US

The US plays a prominent role in EU–Asia security relations for two reasons. Firstly, because it has been under the US security umbrella for decades, the EU has to consider US opinion when developing its autonomous security policy towards Asia. For the EU, the price of the US's security commitment is acceptance of the US's strategic primacy. Therefore, the EU's previous security strategy in Asia was mostly operationalized in the form of transatlantic cooperation. For instance, in its 2012 Guidelines on the EU's Foreign and Security Policy in East Asia, the EU stressed that it was aware of the US's status as an important contributor to regional stability and it had a strong interest in cooperation with the US on security policy challenges related to East Asia (Council of the European Union, 2012, p. 8).

However, in recent years, the growing risk of a US retreat from European affairs has driven the EU to develop its autonomous security policy. In particular, the Trump administration's 'America First' strategy and its weakening commitment to the transatlantic partnership has increased the EU's desire to boost its military capability in Asia. As a result, in its Global Strategy, the EU emphasized that 'strategic autonomy is important for Europe's ability to foster peace and safeguard security within and beyond its borders' (EEAS, 2016, p. 9). In practice, it can be observed that the EU tends to maintain a certain distance from the US's security policy in Asia. For instance, despite the US demand for greater EU involvement in the South China Sea dispute, the EU chose a more cautious approach.

It is noteworthy that the US has traditionally held a negative view of an autonomous EU security strategy, fearing that an autonomous strategy might diminish the EU's commitment to NATO. This negative view caused concern among some EU members, in particular Eastern European and Baltic states, which rely heavily on the US for security protection against Russia. The EU as a whole therefore has to take the US position into consideration when developing its security policy in Asia.

Secondly, the dominance of the US in providing hard security in Asia diminishes the EU's attractiveness to Asian countries as a security actor. For instance, on the basis of bilateral security treaties, the US has established

strategic alliances with five countries in the Asia-Pacific: Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), the Philippines, Thailand, and Australia. Certain other Asian countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, maintain close security cooperation with America without signed bilateral security treaties. Unlike the US, the EU is not able to offer security guarantees and therefore has no network of military alliances in Asia. In other words, because they have US security commitments, some Asian countries tend to consider the EU a secondary security partner.

## 2. Increasing Significance of Non-Traditional Security Issues

Since the 1990s, non-traditional security threats have gained increasing significance globally, and Asia has confronted a series of non-traditional security challenges, such as irregular migration, infectious diseases, transnational crimes, poverty, and environmental pollution. For those Southeast Asian countries that remain politically fragile and depend on economic growth for legitimacy, non-traditional security threats pose a greater danger to regime survival than traditional security threats (Arase, 2010, p. 810). There is a growing need in Asia for experience in tackling non-traditional security threats.

The EU has long prioritized non-traditional security issues in its security policy. For instance, the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) identified three non-traditional security challenges (terrorism, organized crime and state failure) but only two traditional challenges (regional conflicts and the proliferation of WMD) as the main security challenges (Council of the European Union, 2003). In the Global Strategy, out of five external action priorities, the EU identified three non-traditional security concerns: counterterrorism, cybersecurity and energy security (EEAS, 2016).

The increasing significance of non-traditional security issues in both Asia and Europe has had significant impact on EU–Asia security policies. The term non-traditional security legitimizes the EU's active involvement in various security areas in Asia. Aware of its limited hard security power and the underlying principle of state sovereignty, the EU avoids direct strategic involvement in Asia and tends to refer to non-traditional security concepts (Maier-Knapp, 2014). One example of this is that, when engaging in South China Sea disputes, the EU used NTS concepts including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the legally binding Code of Conduct on the South China Sea between ASEAN and China. Employing non-traditional security concepts allows the EU to sidestep political sensitivities.

## III. REVISITING THE CAPABILITY–EXPECTATIONS GAP (CEG) AND THE EU'S SECURITY RELATIONS WITH ASIA

This section provides an analytical framework for this research, drawing on the concept of the capability–expectations gap (CEG) (Hill, 1993, 1998). Before explaining how this concept is applied to the study of the EU's security relations with Asia, there follows a brief discussion of how CEG is understood in this article.

The concept of CEG was developed by Christopher Hill in 1993 against the backdrop of the adoption of the 1991 Maastricht Treaty and the establishment of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). After the end of the Cold War, the EU's political weight, along with external expectations about its role as an international actor, increased significantly (Larsen, 2017). Aiming to contribute to the discussion about the EU's international role, Hill introduced the CEG as a framework for evaluating the discrepancy between the expectations of the outside world and EU internal actors about the EU's capability[1] to implement particular policies, and the EU's actual capacity to fulfil those expectations (Hill, 1993, 1998; Larsen, 2017).

Capabilities are defined as the EU's 'ability to agree, its resources and the instruments at its disposal' (Hill, 1993, p.315). Demands and resources are connected in the sense that when the EU has a stronger ability and willingness to take on foreign policy tasks, the external expectations will increase as well. According to Hill, the CEG can be seen as a tool for measuring the EU's actorness and reflecting on how to reduce the capability/capacity gap (Hill, 1998). In order to reduce the CEG, the EU can either adjust its foreign policy narrative (e.g. tone down its ambitious agenda) or provide more capability to fulfill expectations. The CEG thus serves as a useful indicator of the EU's performance: the narrower the CEG, the closer the EU gets to becoming a comprehensive international actor (Larsen, 2017).

Over the past two decades, the CEG has been widely used in European foreign policy research. Nevertheless, as Larsen rightly observed, although the concept of CEG has become a 'standard reference' in accounts of EU foreign policy, 'it is presented as a fact about European foreign policy rather than as a dynamic concept to be applied empirically as an analytical tool' (Larsen, 2019, p.6). In other words, despite being widely mentioned and uncritically cited in the literature of EU external relations, relatively little research has adopted CEG as an analytical framework for empirical

[1] Hill only mentioned external expectations in his 1993 article, but he expanded the definition to include internal expectations in the 1998 publication.

investigations of EU foreign policy. Moreover, when CEG is applied in empirical studies, the criteria for assessing expectations and capabilities are rarely made explicit, given that the CEG mostly functioned as a general framing tool rather than an analytical tool shaping actual empirical investigations (ibid: 7).

In this article, contrary to the conventional use of CEG to describe a quasi-permanent phenomenon that characterizes EU foreign policy (Larsen, 2019), CEG will be used as an analytical framework for empirical research on the recent development of the EU's security strategy towards Asia. Over the past five or six years, the EU has increased its engagement in Asian security matters. Whilst an increasing volume of literature has explored the EU's foreign and security relations in Asia (see for example Song and Wang, 2019; Chen and Gao, 2020), there has been no holistic assessment of whether the EU can be seen as a 'comprehensive international actor' in Asia, especially against the backdrop of rising geopolitical and security volatility at regional and global levels. As can be seen from the EU's newly published policy papers on Asia, exemplified by the 2018 Council Conclusions (on deepening security relations in and with Asia) and Joint Communication (connecting Europe and Asia), the EU has clearly attempted to increase its ambition and visibility in its security relations with Asian partners, and develop a more coherent strategy. The extent to which the EU has fulfilled its EU–Asia security cooperation objectives remains underexplored, however. Furthermore, it remains open to question whether Asian actors recognize the EU's role as a security provider. This article contends that CEG can provide an effective framework to scrutinize the EU's security policy objectives and its performance in implementing security-related policies in the region.

CEG is not an unfamiliar concept in the study of EU–Asia relations. For example, Wong (2012) modified the concept to inform his research on perceptions of the EU's capabilities among political elites in Singapore, Indonesia, and Vietnam. This paper departs from these studies in two main ways. First, whereas Wong (2012) tended to emphasize 'expectations' in their analyses, this paper attaches equal importance to the evaluation of internal expectations, external expectations, and EU capabilities (resources, cohesiveness, instruments) in EU–Asia security relations. Second, instead of focusing on specific Asian countries, this paper takes into account EU security strategies towards East Asia in general, including China, ASEAN, Japan, South Korea, and DPRK.

In order to remedy CEG's lack of empirical applicability (Larsen, 2019), the article establishes a number of measurements to improve the operationalization of CEG in empirical investigations. The following table summarizes the definitions, indicators and examples of the CEG framework.

**TABLE 1. CAPABILITIES-EXPECTATIONS GAP FRAMEWORK AND ITS KEY ELEMENTS**

| CEG | Key aspect | Definition (Hill,1993, 1998) | Empirical indicator in this study |
|---|---|---|---|
| Capability | Resources | Resources of population, wealth, technology, human and political stability | e.g. The EU's market size; EU trade and investment flow in Asia; financial resources allocated to security-related programmes in Asia |
| | Instruments | Instruments of foreign policy, including the use of threat of force, diplomacy, economic carrots and sticks, cultural influence | e.g. Various multilateral, inter-regional and bilateral dialogue and policy instruments between the EU and key Asian actors in security-related issue areas |
| | Cohesiveness | The capacity to reach a collective decision and to stick to it | e.g. The capacity of EU member states and EU institutions to reach a collective decision in terms of security-related policy objectives towards Asia |
| Expectations | Internal Expectation | Ambitions or demands of the EU's international behaviour which derive from inside the Union | e.g. Ambitions or demands of the EU's behaviour and role in security field in Asia which derive from inside the Union |
| | External Expectation | Demands of the EU's international behaviour which derive from outside the Union | e.g. Demands of the EU's behaviour and role in security field in Asia which derive from key Asian actors in discussions |

Source: developed by the authors based on Hill's original definition of CEG (Hill, 1993, 1998).

## IV. ANALYSIS OF THE EU'S CEG IN ITS SECURITY RELATIONS WITH ASIA

In this section, all the factors of the CEG framework identified in Table 1 will be applied to analyze the EU's security cooperation with Asia. The EU's capabilities, including its resources, instruments and cohesiveness will be examined in the first place, followed by a discussion on internal and external expectations.

### 1. Resources

With the exception of French forces stationed in its South Pacific territories, the EU does not have a permanent military presence in Asia. Therefore, instead of investing in hard security engagement, the EU most-

ly devotes its financial resources to tackling non-traditional security threats in the region. For instance, the EU allocated €8.5 million to enhance security cooperation in India, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea and Vietnam, with an emphasis on the NTS issues of counterterrorism, cybersecurity, maritime security and crisis management (European Commission, 2019). The most recent example of EU financial resources being used to deal with NTS threats in Asia is its promise of €350 million to assist ASEAN's fight against the coronavirus. The EU is also Asia's largest development aid donor (Youngs, 2015, p. 11). The EU has pledged more than €170 million to fund the post–2015 ASEAN regional integration agenda, more than doubling the amount given in 2007–13. In addition, the EU has committed over €3 billion to combat poverty in low-income ASEAN countries.

Nevertheless, enormous financial resources that the EU has invested in tackling NTS threats in Asia do not automatically lead to increasing recognition of the EU's security role in the region. This is mainly because of a perception gap between Asian countries and the EU regarding how to understand security. Many Asian diplomats consider security primarily as a matter of geopolitical balancing, and are therefore critical that the EU understands this term in a rather soft and broad way (Youngs, 2015, p. 10). Moreover, some Asian countries were disappointed with the EU's apparent unwillingness to take a tougher line on China's actions (ibid.). Consequently, despite the fact the EU has invested much financial resources in dealing with non-tradtional security threats in Asia, the EU is still considered a development donor rather than a security actor (Maier-Knapp, 2014, p. 39). In other words, the EU failed to transform its capability in dealing with non-traditional security threats into further traditional security engagement in the region.

In addition to directly funding its non-traditional security engagement in Asia, the EU's economic weight also is a resource that can be exploited to achieve its security goals in the region. In its trade policy paper, 'Trade for All', the EU stressed that its trade policy must be consistent with other instruments of external action because '[t]he EU Treaties demand that the EU promotes its values, including the development of poorer countries, high social and environmental standards, and respect for human rights, around the world' (European Commission, 2015). It implies that the EU's trade policy is considered a foreign policy tool to promote EU values. Moreover, in 'A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy', published in 2016, the EU argued that to foster its role as a global security provider, it should make full use of its economic potential (EEAS, 2017). In Asia, the EU has proactively used its trade diplomacy to achieve its political goals (Chen and Gao, 2020). For instance, the EU–Thailand FTA and Part-

nership Cooperation Agreement (PCA) negotiations were suspended after the military takeover of Thailand in 2014. The EU stated that it 'will not sign the PCA with Thailand until the country has a democratically elected government in place' (EEAS, 2017). A further example of how the EU has used its trade diplomacy is the conditions it included in the EU–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA). Coming with the conclusion of the EVFTA, the Vietnamese government promised to meet its commitments under the Paris Climate Accords, follow International Labour Organization standards and guarantee government and financial transparency. These examples show that the EU has attempted to tackle certain NTS issues, such as climate change, environmental protection and poverty, by including them in its trade negotiations with Asian countries.

Nevertheless, the use of the EU's economic weight is less effective when negotiating with economically strong partners. For instance, when concluding FTA negotiations with Singapore, the EU made a significant concession on political conditionality by producing a side letter accompanying the EU–Singapore PCA, which guarantees that Singapore's human rights practices would not be affected or challenged by the EU's conditions'. Another example illustrating the EU's limited capability to use its trade power to exert political influence is its failed PCA negotiations with China. Due to China's reluctance to combine trade and non-trade issues in trade negotiations, the EU had to abandon its PCA negotiations with China and start a separate investment negotiation, leaving out non-trade issues. As a result, the EU–China Bilateral Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, excluding non-trade issues, was initiated. The aforementioned examples show that the EU's capability to use its trade diplomacy is limited when negotiating with economically strong partners.

Moreover, the EU's might exert influence on the military balance in Asia through its advanced defence industry. According to the Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute (SIPRI), the exports of conventional weapons from EU member states accounted for 26% of the global total in 2012–16, making the EU the world's second-largest arms exporter after the US (SIPRI, 2019). In Asia, due to a number of security hotspots – the East China Sea, the South China Sea, the Taiwan Strait and the Korean peninsula – an arms race could be observed. As a result, Asia is home to some of the world's largest arms recipient countries: of the 10 largest arms importers in 2013–17, four were in Asia, including India, China, Pakistan and Indonesia (ibid.). Therefore, Asia has appeared as a flourishing market for European arms producers, and EU member states supply a majority of military-related equipment to a number of Asian countries. Observers pointed out that, through exporting arms, the EU

can ensure its Asian allies strengthen military capability, therefore counterbalancing Chinese dominance in the region (Besch and Oppenheim, 2019). One example of this is, the Dutch company Damen exported two Sigma naval frigates to Indonesia in 2017 and 2018 (ibid.).

In its 2016 Global Strategy, the EU emphasizes that a 'sustainable, innovative and competitive European defence industry is essential for Europe's strategic autonomy and for a credible CSDP' (EEAS, 2016). It implies that the EU has recognized its advanced defence industry as one crucial resource that could be exploited to influence the military balance in Asia. However, the EU's capability to use its defence industry to strengthen its security role in Asia is constrained by a lack of coordination and coherence at the EU level. EU member states' arms exports to Asia are mostly driven by a mix of commercial interests and political constraints. They are not guided by a clearly defined EU strategy. One example of this is the EU's embargo on arms sales to China. Due to the EU's concerns over Chinese policies on human rights and democracy, the embargo was announced in a European Council declaration in 1989 (European Council, 1989). Nevertheless, member states have interpreted the precise terms of the Chinese embargo in different ways (Hellström, 2010). For instance, while Germany puts tight restrictions on sales of any military equipment, France believes the embargo only applies to lethal equipment (Hellström, 2010). Meanwhile, member states hold different opinions about whether to lift the embargo. In April 2004, for instance, there was a heated debate within the EU over whether to end the EU's arms sales to China (Rettman, 2011). France lobbied for a removal of the arms embargo while Denmark opposed it, maintaining that no progress on human rights could be observed in China (ibid.). And even though the arms embargo on China is still in place, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Italy are the main supplies of dual-use technologies to China (Pejsova, 2018, p. 9).

Last but not least, the EU's investment in its connectivity strategy is of significance for achieving its security goals in Asia. In its Joint Communication, 'Connecting Europe and Asia' in 2018, the EU proposed a European way of connecting Asia and Europe, covering transport, energy, the digital economy, and people-to-people connectivity (European Commission, 2019). In 2014, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker announced an investment plan through which Europe intends to pump €315 billion into long-term projects and finance European small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from 2015 to 2017. In the European Parliament's July 2014 Political Guidelines, Juncker highlighted the important role of connectivity in this investment plan and stated that 'the focus of this additional investment should be in the areas of infrastructure, notably broadband and energy networks, as well as transport infrastructure in industrial centres'

(European Commission, 2014). It implies that one priority of Juncker's plan is to fund the connectivity plan, which was initiated by the EU according to its growing geopolitical and security calculations toward Asia. This initiative reflects the EU's two main geostrategic considerations in Asia. Firstly, it can be considered as a significant step toward a cohesive approach toward China's Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI). Observers pointed out that this connectivity plan was initiated by the EU to provide an alternative connectivity plan and to counterbalance the BRI. Secondly, inclusion of concepts such as social sustainability, environmental impact, and a rules-based framework in the connectivity plan imply that the EU seeks to ensure greater engagement in these NTS issues in Asia (Chen and Gao, 2020). Taken altogether, financial resources funding the EU's connectivity strategy connecting the EU and Asia is of significance to enhancing the EU's security role in Asia.

## 2. Instruments

Whereas the previous sub-section discusses the resources that the EU has, we now examine the second element of the EU's capabilities – namely a range of security-related 'policy instruments at its disposal' (Hill, 1993). This sub-section first provides a summary of key EU security-related policy and dialogue instruments in relation to Asia at bilateral, interregional and multilateral levels, covering both hard and soft security issues.[2] It then illustrates a number of significant trends and characteristics underlying the EU's security policy implementation in Asia.

The following tables (Tables 2, 3 and 4) provide a preliminary mapping of the key instruments in EU–Asia security relations. First, the instruments are evaluated at three different levels: bilateral (the EU's relations with specific states), interregional (the EU's relations with regional groupings), multilateral (the EU's relations with multiple states/regional groupings or international organizations). Second, we also classify these dialogue and policy instruments based on three broad categories: (a) agreements or action plans adopted by the EU and its Asian partners, (b) dialogue and policy instruments concerning hard security issues (e.g. military and defence), and (c) dialogue and policy instruments concerning soft security issues (e.g. a broad range of NTS issues such as cyber security, energy security, disaster management, counterterrorism).

[2] In order to summarize security-related dialogue and policy instruments in the EU–Asia relations, the article divides the issue areas into hard and soft security for analytical purposes, despite being aware that the boundary between hard and soft security becomes increasingly blurred and that some policy areas (e.g. maritime security) should be considered as having both hard security and soft security dimensions. In this table, hard security refers to policy areas with a narrow focus on the military aspects of security, whereas soft security refers to a much wider range of issue areas characterized by non-military elements (Herd and Aldis, 2014).

**TABLE 2. KEY INSTRUMENTS OF EU-ASIA SECURITY COOPERATION (BILATERAL)**

| | | Agreement/ Action Plan | Hard Security | Soft Security |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bilateral | China | • EU–China 2020 strategic agenda for cooperation (2013)<br>• The Joint Declaration on Non-proliferation and Arms Control<br>• EU–China Partnership on Climate Change (2005)<br>• EU–China Roadmap on energy cooperation (2016) | • EU–China informal security dialogue attended by high-level military and government officials, academics and security experts (2018)<br>• EU–China dialogue on Defence and Security (2014) | • EU-China Summit (since 1998)<br>• EU–China High-level Strategic Dialogue (since 2010)<br>• EU–China Connectivity Platform (since 2015)<br>• EU–China Cyber Taskforce (2012)<br>• EU–China Water Policy Dialogue (part of which is related to soft security issues such as food and energy security; since 2019)<br>• EU–China Disaster Risk Management Project (2012-2017)<br>• EU-led joint antipiracy exercise in the Gulf of Aden (Operation Atalanta), with China being an active contributor |
| | Japan | • Action Plan for EU–Japan Cooperation (2001)<br>• EU–Japan Mutual Legal Assistance Agreement in criminal matters (2009)<br>• EU–Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement (2018)<br>• EU–Japan Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity (2019) | • Regular dialogues on defence and security policy between the EU and Japan<br>• High-level military figures' visits between the EU and Japan<br>• Defence technological and industrial cooperation agreements between EU member states (France, Germany, Italy, Sweden) and Japan | • EU-Japan Summit (since 1984)<br>• EU–Japan Strategic Dialogue on East Asia's Security Environment (since 2005)<br>• EU–Japan Strategic Dialogue on Central Asia's Security Environment (since 2006)<br>• EU–Japan High Level Group (since 2010)<br>• EU–Japan Cyber Dialogue (since 2014)<br>• EU–Japan expert meeting on humanitarian assistance and emergency relief (since 2016)<br>• EU–Japan counter-piracy cooperation in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden |
| | South Korea | • EU–South Korea Framework Agreement (2014)<br>• EU–South Korea Crisis Management Participation Agreement (2016) | • Regular EU–South Korea Security and Defence Dialogue (since 2015, not annual) | • EU-South Korea Summit (since 2002)<br>• EU-South Korea High-Level Political Dialogue (since 2011)<br>• EU–South Korea Cyber Dialogue (since in 2013)<br>• EU–South Korea annual political dialogues on the |

| | | Agreement/ Action Plan | Hard Security | Soft Security |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Middle East and North Africa (since 2012)<br>• EU–South Korea Working Group on Counterterrorism (since 2018)<br>• Recurring dialogues on non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control between the EU and South Korea (since 2005)<br>• EU–South Korea Informal consultations on the DPRK (since 2011)<br>• Combined EU-South Korea missions combating piracy in the western Indian Ocean.<br>• EU-South Korea Informal consultations on the DPRK since 2011 |
| | DPRK | | • EU sanctions towards DPRK's nuclear and missile programmes | • EU has provided more than EUR 135 million in humanitarian aid funding to support over 130 projects in DPRK (since 1995)[3] |

**TABLE 3. KEY INSTRUMENTS OF EU-ASIA SECURITY COOPERATION (INTERREGIONAL)**

| | | Agreement/ Action Plan | Hard Security | Soft Security |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Interregional | ASEAN | EU–ASEAN Enhanced Partnership (2007) Plan of Action (2007–12; 2013–17; 2018–22) | • The Aceh Monitoring Mission<br>• CSDP Orientation Courses with a special focus on EU–ASEAN relations | • EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meetings<br>• ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference with the EU<br>• EU-ASEAN Senior Officials Meetings<br>• EU–ASEAN High Level Maritime Dialogue (since 2014)<br>• EU–ASEAN Migration and Border Management Project (since 2009)<br>• EU integrated programme to support ASEAN Coor- |

[3] European Commission. "European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations: North Korea Factsheet", Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/asia-and-pacific/north-korea_en.

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|---|---|---|---|
| | | | dinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (2018-2025)<br>• EU CBRN CoE initiatives in Southeast Asia (since 2010)<br>• EU-ASEAN Policy Dialogue on Human Rights addressing the safety of migrant workers<br>• Disaster preparedness initiatives in Southeast Asia and South Asia<br>• Various EU-initiated workshops on cybercrime legislation and capacity-building in ASEAN<br>• EU-ASEAN Ccybersecurity project YAKSHA (from 2018 to 2020). |

**TABLE 4. KEY INSTRUMENTS OF EU-ASIA SECURITY COOPERATION (MULTILATERAL)**

| | Agreement/ Action Plan | Hard Security | Soft Security |
|---|---|---|---|
| Multilateral | | • EU participation in the multinational naval exercise hosted by Indonesia in 2016<br>• The peace and development conference on the Western Balkans co-chaired by Japan and the EU in 2004 | • ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF): EU's participation in ARF activities in areas such as non-proliferation and disarmament, counterterrorism and transnational crime, security of ICT, confidence-building measures, maritime security;<br>• Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM): the EU came up with the ASEM Asia Financial Crisis Response Trust Fund in 1998; ASEM has a dedicated political pillar addressing issues such as non-proliferation, counterterrorism, maritime security<br>• Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP): the EU led a study group on Preventive Diplomacy from 2014 to 2015.<br>• The EU's and Japan's promotion of the Arms Trade Treaty |

| | Agreement/ Action Plan | Hard Security | Soft Security |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | within the UN framework (2012)<br>• EU–China cooperation under the framework of UN Convention against Transnational Crime<br>• EU–Japan security cooperation in the cases of Mali, Niger and Congo<br>• EU-UNODC Joint Initiative in the framework of the Counter-terrorism sub-programme which focuses on East and Southeast Asia (from 2011 to 2016) |

Based on the summary of EU instruments in Tables 2, 3 and 4, we identify several important features underlying the EU's security policy implementations in Asia. Firstly, one major feature characterizing the EU's security cooperation with Asia lies in the existence of a strikingly dense network of institutions and cooperation instruments with key Asian actors. Despite being a relatively new security actor in Asia, the EU has incrementally formulated a wide range of multi-level dialogue and consultation frameworks with China, Japan, South Korea and ASEAN. For instance, there exist multiple forms of summits, sectoral dialogues and regular high-level meetings between the EU and its three strategic partners (China, Japan and South Korea). While the annual bilateral summits are concerned with virtually all aspects of the strategic partnerships, Table 2 highlights the dialogues and meetings that focus specifically on security issues, such as EU–South Korea Security and Defence Dialogue, EU–Japan Strategic Dialogue on East Asia's Security Environment, High-level military figures' visits between the EU and Japan and EU–China High-level Strategic Dialogue.

ASEAN represents an interesting case in EU–Asia security relations, given the EU's recent intention to upgrade EU–ASEAN partnership to a 'strategic level' (European Commission, 2015). In fact, during the early period of EU–ASEAN cooperation, the EU did not accord ASEAN a high profile in its external security relations. Therefore, there was a lack of sector-oriented policy instruments. Security cooperation between the EU and ASEAN were often nested into a number of general dialogue mechanisms such as the biennial ASEAN–EU Ministerial Meetings, the ASEAN–EU Senior Officials' Meetings and the ASEAN–EU Joint Cooperation Com-

mittee. However, over the past few years, the EU has initiated a number of issue-centred instruments to strengthen its cooperation ties with ASEAN, exemplified by the the EU–ASEAN High-Level Dialogue on Maritime Security and CSDP orientation seminars focusing on the EU–ASEAN relationship (European Commission, 2015).

Although many of these summits, dialogues and sectoral meetings serve mainly as a declarative style of work, they can be considered as important instruments facilitating the process of socialization between the EU and its Asian counterparts. As mentioned in the existing literature, these institutional configurations can play a pivotal role in facilitating the exchange of ideas, perspectives and practices between political actors (Simmons and Elkins, 2004). For instance, the recently established EU–ASEAN High Level Dialogue on Maritime Security has served as a new platform for senior officials and experts from the EU and ASEAN to identify elements of a future work plan to implement the maritime security component of the EU–ASEAN Plan of Action 2018-22 (EEAS, 2017).

Secondly, another feature of the EU's security cooperation instruments with Asia lies in the important role of multilateral for a in facilitating EU–Asia cooperation. Given that the Union attaches great importance to the principle of effective multilateralism, the EU has privileged multilateral cooperative mechanisms in Asia. As illustrated in Table 4, a significant number of concrete security-related activities have taken place in wider multilateral frameworks, such as ARF, ASEM, CSCAP and the UN framework. In particular, the EU has utilized the ARF as the most significant regional multilateral platform to promote its security and political interests in the Asian region, given the fact that ARF is the only security-related organization that brings all the states with a direct interest in Asia. Moreover, multiple cooperation initiatives between the EU and Asian states took place under the wider UN framework, exemplified by the EU's and Japan's promotion of the Arms Trade Treaty within the UN framework (2012), EU–China cooperation under the framework of UN Convention against Transnational Crime, and the EU–UNODC Joint Initiative in the framework of the Counterterrorism sub-programme.

Lastly, based on the existing dialogue and policy instruments identified in Tables 2, 3 and 4, it can be observed that EU–Asia security cooperation has essentially been confined to soft security issues, although the Union demonstrates stronger willingness to enhance hard security cooperation with Asian partners. Soft security issues such as counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance and peace building have long been the EU's major concerns in Asia, as stated in the Union's 1994 and 2001 Asia strategies (European Commission, 1994 and 2001). While these topics still remain as

the EU's primary considerations, it is noteworthy that during the 2010s, the EU has shifted its focus towards several newly emerging policy areas, through which the Union attempts to leverage greater security impact in Asia. The following paragraphs highlight three new security-related areas that the EU has prioritized in its recent engagement in Asia, namely maritime security, connectivity, and cyber security.

The EU's 2018 council conclusions on 'enhanced EU security cooperation in and with Asia' (Council of the European Union, 2018) and the related Commission Action Document (European Commission, 2019) explicitly identified maritime security as one of the most important areas for deeper security engagement in Asia. The EU's active promotion of maritime security cooperation with Asian partners is closely linked to the Union's economic interests. As an important trading power, the EU relies heavily on open, free and maritime shipping. Fully 90% of the EU's external trade is seaborne. In 2018 alone, trade between the EU and Asia was valued at €1.4 trillion, and 50% of those traded goods passed through the Indian Ocean (EUISS, 2019). Another driving factor is the fact that maritime security, due to its complex nature, offers an ideal platform for the EU to leverage its political and security influence in Asia, especially in terms of addressing functional security issues such as port security, maritime law enforcement, maritime resource management and conflict prevention. As shown in Table 2, concrete instruments concerning maritime security adopted by the EU were limited bilateral level, despite the fact that the Union has continuously emphasized the importance to deepen maritime security cooperation at bilateral level with Japan, China and South Korea. At the time of writing, two concrete EU-initiated policy instruments can be identified in the context EU–Asia maritime security cooperation: EU–ASEAN High Level Dialogue on Maritime Security, and the EU's co-chairmanship of the ARF Inter-sessional Meeting on Maritime Security from 2017 until 2020.

In a similar way, the issue of connectivity has recently emerged as a new focal area in the EU's strategy towards Asia. Whereas the EU's 2012 guidelines on foreign and security policy in East Asia did not mention the term 'connectivity' at all, the 2016 EUGS referred to the need to develop 'a coherent approach to China's connectivity drives westwards' through policy tools such as ASEM, the EU–China connectivity platform and the EU–ASEAN framework (EEAS, 2016, pp.37–8). In May 2018, the EU published the Council's conclusions on enhanced security cooperation in Asia, which explicitly stated that connectivity and security 'should be mutually reinforcing' (Council of the European Union, 2018, p.2). As stated in the earlier section, the EU's newly developed connectivity strategy towards Asia is tightly interconnected with the Union's geopolitical and

security ambitions in the region, especially its intention to counterbalance China's BRI, as well as to deepen the cooperation with Asian countries in tackling hybrid threats and transnational security challenges intertwined with connectivity issues.

Two instruments in this field merit specific attention: the EU–China connectivity platform established in 2015, and the EU–Japan partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure adopted in 2019. Partly due to the Union's skepticism and concerns over the potential economic, societal and security risks of EU member states' cooperation with China under the BRI, the EU–China connectivity platform has resulted in limited substantive progress. According to the EU–China Connectivity Platform 2019 Annual Action Plan, it can be observed that the interactions remained at the level of policy exchanges and joint study. The document also reveals a lack of mutual understanding between the two actors in terms of construction standards and investment rules (European Commission, 2019). It can therefore be argued that the EU–China Connectivity Platform remains at the stage of enhancing mutual understanding and exploring synergies between the EU's and China's approach to connectivity. To the contrary, in the case of EU–Japan connectivity cooperation, the EU expresses a strong willingness and commitment to develop substantive cooperation with Japan on connectivity matters, exemplified by deepening cooperation in regulatory frameworks, enhancement of security of transport, and financial cooperation. It is also pointed out that the ultimate objective underlying the 2019 EU–Japan partnership on sustainable connectivity "is eventually extending beyond connectivity to encompass security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, which would benefit the EU's credibility as a global foreign and security actor" (Esteban and Armanini, 2020). These observations illustrate that geopolitical and security considerations in fact play a significant role in shaping the EU's formulation of concrete cooperation instruments with its Asian partners on connectivity matters.

The third new policy area that merits attention in the context of EU–Asia security relations is cyber security. Acknowledging that information technology constitutes the backbone of European societies, the EU has made cyber security one of its key security priorities. The Union's prioritization of cyber security is reflected in its recent security strategy in Asia. Whereas the EU's 2012 Guidelines on foreign and security policy in East Asia did not mention cyber security, the 2018 Council conclusions on enhanced EU security cooperation in and with Asia listed cyber security as one of the major areas for the EU's deeper security engagement (Council of the European Union, 2018). Furthermore, the Commission's 2019 Action Document 'Security cooperation in and with Asia' categorized cyber

security as one of four focal sectors of EU intervention (along with maritime security, counterterrorism and crisis management) (European Commission, 2019). In terms of concrete dialogue and policy instruments, the EU has primarily relied on multilateral for a such as ARF inter-sessional meetings on ICT security, ASEM cyber security workshops, and new bilateral mechanisms such as the EU–China cyber taskforce, EU–Japan cyber dialogue and EU–South Korea cyber dialogue. The EU also initiated multiple workshops and projects in ASEAN on the topic of cyber security legislation and capacity-building. Beyond a wide range of dialogues, concrete EU initiatives can be observed, exemplified by the newly established YAKSHA cyber security project which aims to enhance EU–ASEAN cooperation in the cyber domain and to build up partnerships in the cyber security area by developing a solution tailored to specific users and local needs, leveraging EU know-how and experience in cyber security governance (European Commission, 2018b).

In short, over the past few decades, the EU has developed comprehensive and complex institutional networks and cooperation instruments with its key Asian partners drawing on bilateral, interregional and multilateral approaches. The EU's utilization of these instruments reveals a tendency of shifting from declarative to substantive cooperation at concrete policy level, with an increasing prioritization of soft security issues such as maritime security, cyber security and connectivity.

### 3. Cohesiveness (the ability to agree)

After examining the instruments, we now look at the last element of the EU's capabilities – cohesiveness, or the ability to agree (Hill, 1993).To enhance the cohesiveness of EU foreign policy, the Lisbon Treaty introduced a series of innovations, in particular establishing the post of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policies, which also comes with the title of Vice President of the European Commission (HR/VP), and the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS). These institutional developments open the door to the additional autonomy of supranational actors, ensuring the horizontal and institutional coherence of external action.

However, as Hill argues, 'setting things down more explicitly and logically in treaty form is far from ensuring a greater degree of cohesion' (Hill, 1997, p. 14). In practice, confusion and divergence with regard to the EU's security policy towards Asia can be observed. Empirical evidence indicates that member states have struggled to reach a unified position on Asia. One example of this is member states' divergent positions on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In March 2019, the Italian government

signed a BRI-related memorandum of understanding (the 'China–Italy MoU'). The China–Italy MoU made Italy the first member of the Group of Seven major developed economies (G7) to conclude a BRI cooperation instrument. Before Italy, 13 other EU member states had signed bilateral agreements with China, thus becoming official members of the BRI. Other EU member states have expressed concerns about the BRI. For instance, in the Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council, the Commission stressed the necessity of a unified policy towards China (European Commission, 2019). In particular, the Commission emphasized that in cooperating with China, Central and Eastern European countries 'have a responsibility to ensure consistency with EU law, rules and policies' (European Commission, 2019).

An additional factor constraining the cohesiveness of the EU's security policy in Asia is divergence among EU institutions. For instance, the European Parliament and the European Commission have different priorities when dealing with ASEAN (Chen and Gao, 2020). The European Parliament has consistently raised concerns about human rights abuses in certain ASEAN countries (European Parliament, 2017). Moreover, the EP considers trade policy a means to promote respect for human rights and sustainable development in Southeast Asia (European Parliament, 2017). By contrast, the European Commission and EEAS tend to adopt a more practical approach when engaging with ASEAN (Chen and Gao, 2020). One example indicating the divergence between the EP and the European Commission is the dispute over the conclusion of the EU–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA). A majority of the EU Parliament opposed the EVFTA, saying that the Vietnamese government ignored the right to freedom of association and expression, but the deal was pushed through by the Commission regardless (Lindsay, 2019).

Another interesting observation is related to the instruments that the EU prioritize in its security relations with Asia. As illustrated in the previous sub-section, the EU's security policy instruments reveal a differentiated approach instead of a coherent one. Despite claiming to pursue a more coherent strategy to security in and with Asia (European Commission, 2019), the EU has in fact prioritized a so-called 'tailored-made' approach of cooperation (Council of the European Union, 2018). As shown in Table 2, the EU has established FwA and SPA with South Korea and Japan respectively. These bilateral agreements serve as legal links between economic and political issues, signifying a greater degree of potential and commitment to develop into substantive security cooperation. Notably, the EU and South Korea have established a framework agreement on crisis management, which symbolizes the closest relations the EU has developed with a state. Nevertheless, in the case of EU–China relations, there has

been a lack of formal agreement between the two parties, despite the existence of a label of strategic partnership. Moreover, recent EU–China relations have been marked by a tougher EU approach towards Asia, which is likely to generate more confrontational interactions and competitions between the two actors (Brattberg and Le Corre, 2020). These dynamics will inevitably affect the development of EU–China cooperation in the security domain in a negative way. A comparison between the EU's attitudes towards Japan and South Korean and China shows that the Union has adopted significantly different approaches in relation to its strategic partners in Asia. This factor may hinder the EU's formulation of a genuinely coherent and holistic security approach in the region.

## 4. Internal and External Expectations

After analyzing the three components of the EU's capabilities, this section examines both internal and external expectations which form another dimension of the CEG framework.

### 4.1 Internal Expectations

Overall, the past decade has witnessed a considerable increase of the EU's internal expectations concerning its security role in Asia. The Union's security interests in, and intention to deepen security cooperation with, Asia was manifested in the EU's early Asia strategy during the 1990s. The 1994 Asia Strategy was the first policy paper delivering an overarching EU approach towards Asian security issues, including nonproliferation, arms control and human rights. According to it, the basic objective of the EU's security policy towards Asia was 'to demonstrate to the Asian countries the ability and commitment of Europe to make a positive contribution to the peaceful development and stability of the region' (European Commission, 1994). The main form of security cooperation identified in this policy paper was security dialogue at the bilateral, regional and multilateral levels (European Commission, 1994). The 2001 Enhancing the Asia Strategy updated the EU's security policy towards Asia (European Commission, 2001). In comparison to the 1994 Strategy, more concrete programs aiming at strengthening EU–Asia cooperation in security areas was identified (European Commission, 2001). Nevertheless, the EU's ambitions and expectations in terms of playing a significant role in security domain in Asia remained limited.

In 2012, the EU recommended an updated set of guidelines for the EU's security in East Asia based on the earlier 2008 guideline (European

Commission, 2008), and expanded security agendas in which it sought to cooperate with Asian countries (Council of the European Union, 2012). It is noteworthy that for the first time the EU stressed that its policy toward Asian countries was embedded in its wider global agenda. Most recently, in its 2018 Council conclusion on enhanced EU security cooperation in and with Asia, the EU further listed key areas for deeper security engagement and identified priority Asian security partners (Council of the European Union, 2018). In the same year, along with the recognition of the importance of connectivity to the EU's security policy, the EU proposed an EU Strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia, aiming to improve connection between Europe and Asia (European Commission, 2018). As can be seen from the foregoing, the EU has increasingly considered itself as a significant security player, or even a security provider in Asia.

### 4.2 External expectations

Overall, there exists a significant level of imbalance between internal expectations from the EU and external expectations from Asian actors in terms of the EU's actorness. Most Asian countries do not consider the EU as a security provider. This limited degree of recognition is manifested in ASEAN's rejection of the EU joining the East Asia Summit, despite the Union's ongoing campaign to participate in the summit. For Japan and South Korea, the recent adoption of EU–Japan SPA and EU–South Korea FTA indicates that both Japan and South Korea have demonstrated greater willingness to cooperate with the EU in the security domain. Nevertheless, given the fact that both Japan's and South Korea's security and defence strategy have been deeply rooted in their alliances with the USA, the EU has not been perceived as a genuine security provider in the region due to a lack of military presence. In fact, the EU itself has also been aware that there has been a 'lack of clear perception of EU as a security actor and security partner' in the Asian region in general (European Commission, 2019).

Having said that, a number of factors may potentially contribute to changing Asian actors' perception of and expectations towards the EU in security domain. Above all, an increasing level of transnational security threat or non-traditional security challenges in both Asia and Europe has created more windows of opportunity for the EU to participate in Asia's security governance. For example, the EU's recent support to enhancing Southeast Asian countries' capability in addressing CBRN risks under the wider framework of the EU CBRN CoE initiative can be seen as a telling example, showing how trans-boundary security problems generate a high level of functional demand in Asian countries and how the EU can make peculiar contributions to mitigating these risks. Upon the success and ef-

fectiveness of these cooperation mechanisms, Asian stakeholders may incrementally adjust their perceptions of the EU and incrementally recognize the contributions that the EU can make in security areas.

Another factor that may result in an increasingly positive view and expectations from Asian actors lies in the EU's efforts to widen its outreach to officials and public diplomacy activities to promote better knowledge of the EU's security-related activities and policies. Specifically, the EU has not only increased its high-level visits to Asia since 2012 (Youngs, 2015), but also created a dedicated EU Mission to ASEAN in 2015. Multiple EU officials interviewed by the authors acknowledged that EU diplomats working in delegations and missions in Asian states have made significant efforts to increase the Union's visibility in the security domain by sharing best practices and experiences with Asian stakeholders.[4]

## V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In an attempt to provide a timely reflection on the new dynamics of the EU's security strategy towards Asia against the backdrop of rising geopolitical and security volatility at regional and global levels, this article draws on the concept of CEG to develop an empirically grounded analysis of the EU's security relations with Asia, with a particular focus on the Union's newly developed security-related policies and activities in Asia.

By examining the EU's resources, instruments, cohesiveness as well as internal and external expectations of the Union's role in Asian security affairs, this article demonstrates that over the past decade the Union has made significant efforts to mitigate the CEG in the context of EU–Asia security relations. Due to the structural factors at regional and global level such as the US's adjustment of its geostrategic considerations in Asia and the rise of trans-boundary security challenges, the EU has aimed to elevate its security profile in Asia, which forms part of the Union's greater ambition to become a global security provider. Thus, the EU not only proactively increases its resources dedicated to enhancing its security cooperation in Asia, but also attempts to develop a more coherent and holistic security strategy towards the region. Meanwhile, the EU has effectively expanded and diversified the dialogues and policy instruments for engaging in Asian security affairs by creating a growing number of concrete policy initiatives in areas such as cyber security, connectivity and maritime security areas.

[4] Author interviews with multiple EU officials working in EU delegations/missions in China, Singapore and ASEAN, August and September 2017.

Nevertheless, the Union's effectiveness at bridging this CEG in the context of EU–Asia relations has been constrained by various factors. First, the degree of cohesiveness of the EU's security policy towards Asia remains low as a result of divergence among EU member states and EU institutions. Second, it can be observed that since the adoption of the 2016 EUGS, the Union has established an over-ambitious objective to become a security provider in the Asian region. Although there has been positive progress in terms of the EU's internal security and defence cooperation and in the Union's capabilities to initiate and implement multiple security-related initiatives in Asia, the relative importance of the EU's security role in the Asian region is still limited due to the existing US-led hub-and-spoke systems, China's increasing regional actorness, and the EU's lack of sufficient military presence in the region. A bold promise and a self-positioning as an assertive security actor will therefore significantly widen the CEG of the EU. Lastly, with regard to the aspect of external expectations, the perceptions of key Asian actors reveal that the Union is still seen as a marginal security actor in the region. However, an increasing level of recognition of the EU's contribution in certain functional and soft security areas among Asian states can be observed, which may potentially increase Asian stakeholders' demands for the EU's engagement in security-related policy areas such as border management and CBRN risk mitigation.

Overall, although there has been a considerable increase of the EU's internal expectations concerning its security role in Asia over the past decade, Asian countries' expectations with regard to the EU's security role are still low. Meanwhile, despite positive progress in terms of the EU's capabilities of serving as a security provider in Asia, the relative importance of the EU's security role in the Asian region is still limited due to the lack of a coherent security approach in the region, and the US and China's increasing regional actorness.

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