

NEW CONSIDERATIONS ON THE SINO-EUROPEAN RELATIONS, FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE GLOBAL BALANCE OF POWER. THE MIRAGE OF THE SILK ROAD

*„ASIA MATTERS – FOR EUROPE. AND EUROPE MATTERS – FOR ASIA“
Joint declaration of the former European Union leaders,
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16 October 2014

Keywords:

International system – diplomacy – foreign policy – China – European Union – USA – Russia – strategic partnership – European affairs – Eurasia – the Asia-Pacific area

► The world today is a mess, there is no doubt about it. But probably this is also how the contemporaries of other historical times saw their present. We could rather say that the international order is difficult to predict at the beginning of a century which is already dominated by very confusing moves and combinations. Using the author's own means of research and observation (field research, the perception of reality from the perspective of the study of history, and a compared dimension), this article wishes to shed some light on a part of the role played by the European Union in the international policy under the circumstances of the fast transformations suffered by the global economic and security environment. The strategic relation with China is worth discussing at several levels (depending on the various categories of interests); our considerations about the course of the strategic partnership between the two powers and about the current evolutions of the international scene try to provide only some necessary benchmarks for an overall understanding of this diplomatic closeness.

The United States and Russia are global phenomena with complex, eventful trajectories and a direct impact on modern universal history. Having emerged on the international arena approximately at the same time, the evolution of the European Union and China (the name Zhōngguó means the Middle Kingdom) is not reflected in the adoption or appropriation of the features of the old dualist model generated by the two ideologically opposing groups, the West and the East. They both try specific governing and extension formulas: the first chooses the road of the European integration and thus stands out in the classical landscape of intergovernmental cooperation and transnational dialogue between the states and the second counts on the advantages of its physical architecture which generates prosperity, to make its presence felt on the global scene. Last but not least, the article wishes to bring forward, within a certain contextual framework, those essential elements of civilisation which provide an easier understanding of the surrounding political and economic realities, advancing new reflection leads.

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Recently, the ASEM (October) and APEC (November) summits have had the effect of opening the eyes of the public opinion on China and, implicitly, on Asia - a continent whose image is dominated by the moves of this used-to-be “dormant” giant. Not just materials about economics, but also articles debating the contemporary policy dynamics, various social and cultural aspects or security analysis from a compared perspective. In a recent study with the title *The Role of China in Europe’s Perception of Asia* professor S. Bersick¹ comes with a series of important clarifications: the economic and social issues (the economic situation as a whole, investments, business opportunities, sports, elements of culture and civilization) take most of the news time in a generally neutral light and China is Asia’s main vector of visibility in Europe. The media from eight EU reference² - countries - relatively well balanced in terms of politics, economics and culture - tries to provide a legitimate framework for this Asian perception barometer within the European world. Asia as a giant is not seen as a power in itself, as a unitary presence on the international arena (Asia as a non-entity) but just by the actions of its composing states. These states - China, then at a considerable distance Japan, India and South Korea - contribute individually to the distribution and sales of the “concept” with the negative perception (Asia as a peril) visibly characterising the most important level of transcontinental dialogue, i.e. the commercial relations. Also, it is interesting to bear in mind that the European media sees Asia via the United States, which is very much involved in the cooperation process in the region.

This homogenous vs. heterogeneous perception of Asia would be nothing new, for the European Union itself is understood through the lens of its most representative member states. But to what extent do we manage to overcome the simple geographical approach of the subject and the psychological barriers around the notions of distrust, prudence and even fear? Probably this is linked to the progress of the international system as a whole and last but not least, to the controversies of human nature. Through its foreign policy instruments the European Community remains mainly focused on the strategic matters related to neighbouring countries; crisis management and the security of its close proximity frontiers (the safety belt) are its main priority. Following this logic, our ability to understand Asia, the interpretation of the facts happening independently of our collective memory, but also the angle at which we are surprising others’ expectations and decisions are and remain rather limited. Of course, the European Union is not mistaken when it prioritises its foreign policy strategy depending on the regional geo-politics. China does the same in the Asia-Pacific area, trying to set up its own “Commonwealth” first and foremost, its own community of states close to its economic interests and thus to play a regulatory role in the operation of the macro-regional development engine. If you’re well and things are peaceful in your own yard, then you may dedicate your time to other causes, with universal stakes. But the two poles must collaborate permanently, against the backdrop of the general instability, creating new bridges between people and the cultures they represent (through research & innovation, development of the informational society, public diplomacy). This wish becomes an imperative of the ultra-globalised world as the growingly acute interdependency between economies, security strategies, the pragmatic vision and the win-win type relations impose a reorganization of the relations between states.

In order to understand China’s behaviour in the sphere of global action and power we must first look at things from inside. Far from trying to limit the Chinese development model to a set of superficial correlations - as the multiple dimensions of a China of the future³ deserve to be studied in detail by various specialists - I would start with a statement I’ve discovered by chance in a book that I was skimming through at the seventh floor of a big Shanghai book store on my continuous lookout for new sources of information [unfortunately, the number of politics and social sciences books translated into English is still extremely limited, which puts significant barriers to a foreign scholar’s access to long chapters of local history, literature and press]. This

¹ Presentation held at the Fudan University (Shanghai), School of International Relations and Public Affairs - SIRPA, on 21 November 2014.

² Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Romania and the United Kingdom.

³ According to president Xi Jinping, China’s dream is based on a prosperous, powerful country, the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the happiness of the people (*The Chinese Dream of The Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation*, Foreign Languages Press Co. Ltd., Beijing, PRC, 2014).

short, but impressively incisive paragraph might provide a possible explanation to the jostling ascension of contemporary China: „We were born into the world poor through no fault of our own. But to die poor is a sin“⁴. Through a simple trick of the imagination we could try to link this existential testimony of a local from rural China to a much more famous phrase attributed by the Western media to the Chinese leader Deng Xiao Ping (1978-1992): “To get rich is glorious!” (Wealth is glorious). And even if the initiator of China’s modernization policies has never uttered something like this in public, as the Far East is constantly stimulating the fascination of the West, it most certainly could be used as a leitmotif of today’s Chinese miracle, reproducing in force the essence of a general motivation.

Any study of a social-political reality needs several field trips and we are inevitably faced with the desire to make constant comparisons: in other words, an urgent impulse to relate your own interior, your inner ideal of happiness to the outside, to the foreign world, both material and spiritual. Patience (the ability not to judge on a first impression), tolerance (availability for dialogue) and the spirit of observation (the ability to read messages in gestures and reactions) become at this critical point not just qualities but also working tools in the hand of the historian, writer or diplomat. Trips are open books which provide you with something very precious - direct contact with people, with elements from their daily lives, from their space of practices and mentalities. So here I am, for the second time⁵, surrounded by the same crowd - pleasant at the beginning, but tiring as the evening comes, constantly checking the level of air pollution, frequently looking at the sky, puzzled by the disturbing sound of the planes launched in their seemingly never-ending military bravadoes, experiencing live that socio-cultural pressure (some call it shock) which becomes in time a lifestyle but which us, from the outside, see with different instruments. Normality, in its multiple manifestations, is relative from one person to the next, hoping that the individuals - or the states - intuit accurately the common background and surprise the differences, in order to respect them. The clash of civilisations does not happen exclusively between Christians and Islamists, or between communism and capitalism, but also between Eurocentrism and Asiacentrism: two concepts defining opposite political systems and different combinations of thinking mechanisms and beliefs. But do they reject each other in absolute terms? Which is the limit of this cultural-philosophical dichotomy and how can we spread the universal values of peace in order to avoid breaking the balance, mutual delusions and abuses⁶ in the international system?

Like people, countries evolve based on endogenous and exogenous factors which we could put into a pattern determined by certain development parameters: history, traditions, climate, relief, geographical position, available resources, population, and crucial events. The natural conditions⁷ and the social-territorial dynamics fundamentally determine the route and the functioning of a state. A conglomerate like China must therefore be seen through the lens of its evolutionary pattern, conditioned by the proportions of its own expansion, the record number of its population and its specific historical evolution (relation between territory and positioning, related phenomena and human community²). With a surface of 9 562 911 km (World Bank, 2013) and a population of over one billion and three hundred million inhabitants⁸, the People’s Republic of China is today a world giant which covers over 6% of the total Earth surface and has approximately one fifth of the entire world population⁹. And this requires a considerable effort not just from the point of view of the po-

⁴ Leslie T. Chang, *Factory Girls – Voices from the Modern China*, Picador, 2010, p. 64.

⁵ In the summer of 2011 I was attending a Summer School in China organised by the Confucius Institute and the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. I took advantage of this unique cultural experience - the journey covered Beijing, Shaoxing, Hangzhou and Shanghai and published my impressions in a vast travel journal („China – pe repede înainte”, a set of six articles, *Euroeconomia XXI*, Sibiu, Sept.-Oct. 2011).

⁶ Thorsten Pattberg, *The Conceptual Contrast Between Eastern and Western Cultures*, Foreign Languages Press Co. Ltd., Beijing, PRC, 2012, p. 194.

⁷ According to the studies, throughout a period of 2000 years, the territory of modern China has seen a series of extreme phenomena. Figures speak for themselves: 1621 floods, 1392 draughts and 1828 famines, i.e. one each year; and between 1766 BC and 1937 AD there were no less than 5258 disasters, in average one each six months, according to Sujin Guo, *Chinese Politics and Government*, 2012, p. 41.

⁸ More exactly, 1,357 billion inhabitants, as the trend is ascending, World Bank, online database, consulted in October 2014.

⁹ Here you may find some interesting comparisons: Matt Schiavenza, *A Surprising Map of the World Shows Just How Big Chi-*

litical and administrative organization, but also in terms of economic order: the state¹⁰, the main beneficiary of its citizens' work, must produce a lot and in a sustained manner in order to face the constant consumption; the immediate effect - social stability¹¹. The conception of the political and its instruments of action are designed to meet the realities from the inside; the identity construction is based on the need for massive public work, and on an ample, conjugated public intervention for the achievement of a common good which in time becomes that element the survival of the community itself is dependent on¹².

Post-revolutionary China has evolved spectacularly in the last fifty years; massive urbanization (the considerable importance given to industry, transports and communications) but also international cooperation has brought it today in a position slightly comparable to the western countries. Moreover, the start of China's opening policies is considered a decisive factor of development; these reforms were initiated in the early '80s: tens of thousands Chinese could travel to study abroad (especially in the United States) and their professional and research potential upon their return home was and continues to be exploited by the Chinese state¹³. The modernisation of the economy, its alert rhythm and dominant position within the world geopolitics are obviously determined by demographic aspects: 70% of the Chinese population is professionally active, which puts it on the first place among its main opponents on the world markets. However, between 2030-2050 this boom will start decreasing, as the number of active individuals drops by approximately 220 million, argue the experts of the French National Institute for Demographic Studies based on the latest projections of the United Nations¹⁴. The direct causes would be: increased life expectancy and the ageing of the population, low fertility, unbalance between the male-female birth rate percentages. But what does this data say and how sustainable is China's model of economic development? A difficult answer to give.

The OCDE¹⁵ observers announce that the vertiginous growth of urban population (it is estimated that before the end of the century approximately 90% of the population will live in cities) will have rather serious social-economic and environmental repercussions, making life difficult for the Beijing leadership. We shall bring to this discussion only a few elements different from the ones mentioned above, such as the decreased future productivity caused by the decreased percentage of active population, the extremely high level of pollution and especially the chronic rural pollution, health and food security related risks, insufficient food produced by the local agriculture. We could say that China's historical dilemma remains the same: how to overlap the Western order (Westernization) over the essence of its own civilization (Socialist modernization¹⁶) and

na's Population Is, The Atlantic, Aug 14, 2013, online source, consulted in October 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/08/a-surprising-map-of-the-world-shows-just-how-big-chinas-population-is/278691/>.

¹⁰ The state party being the fundamental institution, unlike other political regimes, where parties function as organizations. We remind you the essential characteristic of the Chinese governing model („Socialism with Chinese Characteristics“): a communist, ultra-centralised and bureaucratic state on the unique party skeleton, without a middle class similar to western bourgeoisie, capable to cause major changes on the power monopoly.

¹¹ The Chinese eat industrial amounts of food per day (it is said that the Chinese eat absolutely anything) and the government must ensure and make sure that the entire population is given access to a general source of food, a mandatory prerequisite of social calm and political control.

¹² Unlike European feudalism, as some scholars argue, the hydraulic society - built between its two major coordinates, the Yellow river - „the cradle of Chinese Civilization“ and the Yang Tze River - has allowed for the emergence of the totalitarian state (or eastern despotism) considered as the only form of government strong enough and capable to mobilize the entire workforce and all the available resources in order to build complex and reliable systems and thus save the earth from a disaster, letting it be cultivated and providing food to the population (Guo, *op.cit.*, p. 42).

¹³ Dan A. Popescu, Andreea D. Călbează, *Corespondență din Shanghai-China (II): Studiile peste hotare au deschis frontierele Chinei*, Euroeconomia XXI, Sibiu, Nr. 417, 31 October 2014. The percentage of those who return once their studies abroad completed is, however, small, situated at around 36,5% (2012).

¹⁴ Isabelle Attané, *La Chine, un géant démographique aux pieds d'argile*, INED 2014, online source, consulted in November 2014, <http://www.ined.fr/fr/tout-savoir-population/memos-demo/analyses/chine/>.

¹⁵ Michel Andrieu, *La démographie en Chine: une bombe à retardement*, Programme de l'OCDE sur l'avenir, p. 34, L'Observateur de l'OCDE, No 217-218, Été 1999, online source, consulted in November 2014, http://www.observateurocde.org/news/archivestory.php/aid/20/La_d_E9mographie_en_Chine:_une_bombe_E0_retardement.html.

¹⁶ „The path of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the only way to achieve China's socialist modernization and create a better life for the people“ (president Xi Jinping).

thus transform its weakness in an advantage¹⁷ in a profoundly competitive global context. Let us not forget that the West's economic force and geo-political influence stems from long centuries of accumulations and experiments: the genesis and conceptual acquisitions of the Antiquity in parallel with the migration of the people have determined the evolutions of the medieval state. The geographic expansion¹⁸, the industrial revolution and the cultural-ideological heritage of the Illuminist movement contributed to the baggage of ideas and social-political practices and the cycle ends with the reformation of the governing systems, based on the modern principles of freedom, justice, equity and responsibility. Things have evolved in time; the consciousness of the European citizen had enough time to grow and the society to look for the best route to develop.

FULL STEAM AHEAD, ON THE SILK ROAD!

"This year, the IMF experts have confirmed that the Chinese economy exceeded the American one in terms of volume. Thus, the United States lose their top position for the first time since 1872 when in their turn they overtook the British economy. In 2014 China's gross domestic product amounts to the equivalent of 17,600 billion dollars, while the American economy amounts to 17,400 billion dollars, according to the IMF calculations. Four years ago, it was estimated that the Chinese economy would overpass the Americans sometime in mid-2020. The change occurred, however, in a rhythm more accelerated than any forecast." (Financial Times & Adevărul, 8 October 2014)¹⁹.

Everybody flinched, the media largely speculated on the moment and the figures leave room for interpretations and forecasts of all kinds. For a while (one hour, one day or more, does it actually matter?) China overpassed the United States and became the country with the biggest economy on the planet. Two months later, on December 4th, a similar moment was revealed by MarketWatch. Statistics report, markets react and there is no serious economic analysis or international politics article not to recall, between the lines, of the upsurge registered by the People's Republic of China. The evolution of global trade in terms of volumes is interesting to debate²⁰, but the eradication of poverty and the stimulation of sustainable development are long-term processes and global disparities remain relatively high, if we are to compare the average wage of a Chinese worker to that of an American or the level of the GDP per capita between the two countries²¹. We

¹⁷ Mel Gurtov, *Global Politics in the Human Interest*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., USA, 1988, p. 94.

¹⁸ This time period - generically referred to as the age of the great geographic discoveries - also means the beginning of European colonialism, an aggressive, destructive global phenomenon which even today cannot go without causing deep resentment. A few centuries later, China still keeps a vivid recollection of its encounter with Western civilization, seeing it as a traumatizing, yet mobilizing chapter of its modern history: "Since the British invaders launched the Opium War in 1840, the Western capitalist powers came one after another to China and China was thus gradually reduced to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Over a long period of time, the Chinese people had repeatedly made arduous attempts and launched heroic struggles to overthrow the rule of imperialism and feudalism for the State independence and the freedom of the people" (quoting an explanatory board placed at the Memorial for the site of the First National Congress of the Communist Party of China from Shanghai, a museum which I had the opportunity to visit right around the National Day, in early October 2014).

¹⁹ Keith Fray, *China's leap forward: overtaking the US as world's biggest economy*, Financial Times, Oct 8, 2014, online source, consulted in October 2014, <http://blogs.ft.com/ftdata/2014/10/08/chinas-leap-forward-overtaking-the-us-as-worlds-biggest-economy/>; Elena Dumitru, *Este oficial: China a depășit SUA și a devenit cea mai mare economie din lume*, Adevărul, 8 Oct. 2014, online source, consulted in October 2014, http://adevarul.ro/economie/business-international/este-oficial-china-depasit-sua-devenit-cea-mai-mare-economie-lume-1_54352b590d133766a8c4009d/index.html.

²⁰ The Economist even made a chart of the world's richest economies in time, *The world's richest economies: China no more*, Oct 16, 2014, online source, consulted in October 2014, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/freexchange/2014/10/worlds-richest-economies>.

²¹ China's GDP per capita still remains well below that of the United States - 53 042 compared to 6807 in dollars for the year 2013 (World Bank online ranking). Although today Shanghai has over 4000 skyscrapers, twice as much as New York, this real-estate based vertiginous economic boom is deceiving, argue the experts: "The construction crane isn't necessarily a symbol of economic vitality; it can also be a symbol of an economy run amok" (Davis, WSJ Nov 21). China's ambition to build the highest buildings and its permanent comparison with the United States is not a real indicator of the state of the economy or of the stable growth of its living standards, like we would be tempted to assume: "What's happening in China is similar to what happened in the U.S. 80 to 100 years ago, on a different scale. [...] Cities are competing both within China and also globally for attention and for the appearance that they are first-world. [...] China will get to the point where economic reality

use to say that one can have too much of a good thing. Massive industrialization, the symbol and product of modernization comes with high costs (besides the social-human aspects related to the quality of life); the maintenance of the same accelerated rhythm of consumption by the Chinese state requires access to an increased number of resources and, therefore, a new path to “survival”²². In an extremely globalized and changing economic and political environment, the top positions are always fluctuating and the main actors, depending on the network of partners they wove around them, move and reposition continuously on the strategic interests map.

We must bear in mind that diplomacy, like any other human activity, operates in a context subject to transformations. More than ever, the progress of science and technology (research and innovation as public diplomacy instruments), accompanied by changes in the evolution of mentalities and of collective psychology have led to the increase of the complexity degree applied to the current economic and political practices. However, human nature may be seen as a constant²³. At this point in time, just like one hundred or one thousand years ago, man aims for the same purposes, has the same instincts, responds to the same external stimuli. The difference comes from the successive layers of universal teachings and their interpretations, translated in behaviours. The satisfaction of the basic needs of the contemporary society needs a much larger volume of resources which are depletable. The responsibility, solidarity and willingness to cooperate shown by the states as main actors of international relations in their never-ending fight for access to raw matter and trading markets must define the mandatory reference framework of today’s diplomatic relations. Let’s bring in a new factor - Confucianism, which puts the accent on openness and harmony. “China must preserve and develop its culture, promoting exchanges between civilizations, to make the world a better place” has recently²⁴ stated president Xi Jinping, wishing to reassure the world that its constantly evolving country does not wish to extend or generate conflicts.

In October this year, allocating a very generous space, much more generous than usual - to the EU-China relations, the Chinese media recalled of the European tour of prime-minister Li Keqiang in Germany, Russia and Italy, an opportunity for numerous meetings with political officials and important economic players²⁵. At the end of that same month, in Milan, the tenth high-level conference “Asia-Europe meeting” took place, announcing a closer involvement of China in matters of global governance and security. Launched in 1996, ASEM is the most important intergovernmental platform for dialogue and cooperation between continents. It counts no less than 51 nations plus one special place allocated to the European Commission (recently Croatia and Kazakhstan have expressed their wish to integrate this organization, bringing the number of member states to 53). Beijing’s willingness to talk, to get involved in the current world problems but also to connect to the global solution finding mechanism brings to the foreground a new strategic concept of China’s foreign

- whether that’s on the level of a single developer, local government, or the central government - will become a big factor that overtakes ambition” (*Skyscraper Mania Grips China as Ambitions Trump Economy*, Bloomberg News, July 24, 2014, on-line source, consulted in October 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-07-23/skyscraper-mania-grips-china-as-ambitions-trump-economy.html>).

²² Also named “natural resources diplomacy”. We could define it as that priority strategy axis of a country aimed at procuring and protecting access to natural resources. China’s “explosive” economy calls for such “survival” technique given the constantly growing internal demand for energy and its increased dependence on the oil exporting countries. China has massively extended its influence in Africa, as well - under the umbrella of the development assistance funds - a continent divided between a legion of poor states, but which are extremely “endowed” in natural resources. See also Jihwan Park, *Korean ODA Strategies for Resource Diplomacy towards Africa: Learn the „Angola mode” of Chinese ODA Strategies*, The Journal of East Asian Affairs (INSS Seoul, Korea), Vol. 28, No. 1, Spring/Summer 2014, pp. 1-31. In the period 2010-2012, 51 African states benefited from Chinese assistance funds completed by the setting up of dialogue and regional cooperation mechanisms such as the China Forum – Africa Cooperation (FOCAC, 2000) and the China – ASEAN Summit; the African continent also hosted more than half of the economic infrastructure projects which China contributed to as part of the developing countries, according to *China’s Foreign Aid* (2014).

²³ René Albrecht-Carrié, *A diplomatic History of Europe since the Congress of Vienna*, revised edition, USA, 1973, p. xix.

²⁴ At the opening ceremony of the International Conference commemorating the 2565th anniversary of the birth of Confucius, in Dan A. Popescu, Andreea D. Călbează, *Correspondență din Shanghai-China (I): Confucius citat de către președintele Xi Jinping, drept un exemplu pozitiv pentru națiunea modernă*, Euroeconomia XXI, Sibiu, Nr. 416, 17 October 2014.

²⁵ China Daily Oct 17, Oct 18, Oct 20, Oct 21, Oct 22, Oct 24, 2014; Beijing Review, Oct 23, 2014.

policy: the Silk Road. The phrase has a multicultural resonance, feeding on humanity's historic memory, both from a Western and Eastern perspective. All the more so, it encourages the creation of "economic belts" (Silk Road Economic Belt) and transcontinental "commercial waterways" (21st century maritime Silk Road), necessary in the context of the increased inter-dependence and inter-connectivity between the states. An initiative which was well-received worldwide and discussed at the 22nd high level meeting of the leaders of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC, Beijing, 10-11 November²⁶).

The interest to set up a Eurasian network to coordinate and promote peace and security²⁷ in an extended geographic space and to encourage macro-regional development was reasserted by Premier Li Keqiang present in Italy at the ASEM summit. Discussions focused on the improvement of the three pillars of cooperation: political, economic and cultural-demographic. India and China register an „explosive” rate in terms of population figures, China and Japan, together with the four „Asian tigers”²⁸ are one of the strongest economies on the planet and last but not least, China (UN member and one of the five permanent members of the Security Council), India, Japan and Indonesia (hosting the world's largest Muslim community) are heavy players in the world politics²⁹. It is relatively easy to notice that there is a constant presence in all the three groups of factors influencing the regional and international climate: China, the country deeply preoccupied with its image in the world and capable of vertiginous growth, as recent decades prove it. One thing that requires a much better nuanced and more creative political philosophy and geostrategic behaviour, in order to maximize the efficiency of its action from the global balance of power perspective, in the situation of the fast evolution - and sometimes of the acute deterioration of general state relations.

The theory and practice of international relations show that diplomacy is carried out through negotiation, meaning the parties' availability to communicate through specific means to fulfil certain objectives. In conclusion, we speak of states - or groups of states - which manage to achieve their interests to a bigger or lesser extent, depending on the selected moment, on their own foreign policy strategy or on the negotiation mechanisms. "Some friends are closer friends than other friends" would confess with a smile Michael Reiterer, Senior Adviser of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and former ambassador of the European Union in Switzerland and the Kingdom of Liechtenstein in a presentation³⁰ of the European Union Foreign Policy (CFSP) and of its relations with China. In the language of diplomacy, close friend means strategic partner and since October 2003 (the year of the first "Policy Paper" on the EU, when China takes the operational step from "traditional state-to-state relations" to the community decision level, while also keeping the bilateral line of cooperation and dialogue between the states) and until the present day (it was only in April 2014 that the second „roadmap" was issued - a much more comprehensive guide of China's perception, interests and expectations from the EU, after a relative reluctance in the recent years) the relation of closeness with China tries to reach such an important moment of itself. It may be that Europe needs to become more political than it is now in order to be a credible partner in its attempt for a coherent, winning approach to the strategic relation with China (China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership). It may be that it is time to initiate a reform of its way of thinking and acting in international politics, with objectives and means adapted both to the realism of the big powers (relatively to the security and defence conception) and to its fundamental utopian idealism (a much clearer idea on European integration) in a profoundly imperfect world. For Europe, the major challenge lies in the construction of a new global paradigm, Eurasia, "unité géographique et stratégique majeure" which experts identify as the big balancing scale of world power³¹.

²⁶ Dan A. Popescu, Andreea D. Călbează, *Corespondență din Shanghai-China (III): Asia-Pacific, în fața unei șanse istorice de a stimula dezvoltarea comună #APEC #China2014*, Euroeconomia XXI Sibiu, Nr. 418, 5 December 2014.

²⁷ Marzia De Giuli, *China's Silk Road initiative enhances win-win cooperation*, Shanghai Daily, March 15, 2014.

²⁸ Initially the term of „Asian tigers” (or „Asian dragons”) referred to the economies of four freshly industrialised states from the Far East, i.e. Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, which have passed in the '90s to the stage of developed countries with a quality of life index comparable to that of Western countries. A new group of states took over: Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines (the new "tigers") but also Vietnam.

²⁹ Russia is trying a power-game "at both ends" largely determined by its geographical position which could provide it with political leadership alternatives both on the European and Asian side.

³⁰ Held at Fudan University (Shanghai), School of International Relations and Public Affairs - SIRPA, on 24 October 2014.

³¹ Irnerio Seminare, *Les deux modèles d'Europe: Intégrationniste et stato-national. Qu'est-ce qu'une Europe politique?*, Working Paper, IERI, Bruxelles, Nov 25, 2014.

But what is a Strategic Partnership, to be more precise? Which are the main elements defining it and how does it turn into a useful tool for international politics? At European Union level, the concept of external action still seems very confuse, avoiding discussion about a coherent vision of the 28 member states, especially against the backdrop of a complex decision making mechanism. The states, especially the oldest ones in the European Community, still have the tendency to assume roles and ambitions of autonomous powers, with their own negotiation arsenal and a whole political, military and economic history behind them. They mimic or somehow dodge the idea of cooperation, of a proactive, responsible attitude, aligned to a unitarily expressed interest. These “*primi inter pares*” (referring here particularly to the traditional states from the heavy area of international relations such as Germany, France or the United Kingdom) have in time established privileged relations with China, difficult to melt down in the unique pot of the European construction. The European dimension is complementary to the bilateral relations, making it difficult for an external partner, especially one from the Far East, with inflexible diplomatic traditions and practices, to perceive that unique substance framed by the motto “*United in diversity*” which defines the log of the EU. It remains a challenge for the EU to find the best method to inspire its friends with trust, while permanently adjusting the language and the cooperation strategy.

In general terms, how unproductive is it to aim mainly at national interests on the margin of the European interest? Does the Union have the exclusive role of technical support for the member states, providing only secondary assistance? This is what it inspires, from the outside. It is obvious that the nation state was not too much diluted once with the emergence of the European Union³², being a political and legal construction with much too deep roots in the soil of continental history for it to be eclipsed all of a sudden by the presence of the absorbing European red tape, after the signing of a thick pack of agreements. In spite of the diverse critical voices or of the Eurosceptic currents - which are well represented in the Parliament in Brussels after the last elections, but also in the public life - the European Union continues to play a major role in the life of each and every member state. At the same time, governments and citizens keep their specific interests connected mainly to the spatial and cultural reality they live in. And how could it be otherwise, as long as the states are still seen as the sum of national interests, combining ambition, decision mechanism, coercive force and action? Moreover, except for a political-ideological division of Europe, there still is a fault line drawn according to economic progress and political stability criteria, given by the different historical evolutions of the states. In this direction, we could try to outline relatively easy two categories of member states: the solid nucleus, generally referred to as the western states, free to evolve vertiginously after the Second World War and the states left behind, but which after the fall of the Soviet Union - the gregarious factor, have gotten involved in a series of reforms and in a relatively long transition process - depending on the heritage of each one's past - and which are today in the second gear of the European Union (these are the countries of Central and Eastern Europe).

The reference to the national cultural territories is maintained as an important chain link and the state organization (defined by constitutions, within the different forms of political regime at a European level) remains the fundamental basis of the existence and development of our society. Nevertheless, this equation also has a variable: economy. The economy is the one aiming at more complex relations with other states, with other economies, with other trading markets and other operators involved in production activities. There is no mystery that economy internationalized much faster than the state, implacable in its manifestations of security and sovereignty. The citizens, more or less attached to national-historic values, but definitely having interests of evolution and welfare, from the perspective of the organizations carrying out economic activities, force political actors to conduct a series of new repositioning, in accordance with their current needs. Let's not forget that the European Union started as an economic project (cooperation triggering prosperity on the short and mid-term), the political integration being visible only in the last twenty five years (cooperation

³² Charles B. Blankart, *The European Union: confederation, federation or association of compound states?*, Constitutional Political Economy Journal, Springer, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2007.

triggering security on the long term). But the first decades were dominated by free exchange strategies and policies and by the idea of creating an ideal, competitive market economy; today, the global perspective is imperative. The diverse approach of the relation with China takes into account all these specific development factors, as well as the effects of the economic crisis on a global scale which imposed protectionist policies and strategic regroupings by itself.

Speaking of the relations between the EU and China, it is obvious that the economic and commercial dimensions take precedence over political and security considerations. It seems only natural, since the EU is the biggest player on the global trading scene and China has recently climbed on the top position among the planet's biggest economies, in a close fight with the United States. If we are to judge in chronological terms, two decades ago we could barely speak of a commercial relation between the two economic structures and bilateral exchanges today amount to no less than one billion dollars per day (Deutsche Bank Research 2014). However, the commercial balance is negative for the European Union which invests more and exports less in the relation with its Asian partner. On the other hand, China is permanently looking for new trading and resource markets, courting especially those countries of Europe which were weakened by the crisis (Portugal, Greece, Italy, Spain) or those which are clearly lagging behind the European average (Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania)³³. One way or the other, this international politics³⁴ is paying off and the maximization of coordination at the level of the EU's decision mechanism becomes an imperative of keeping its global economic competitiveness (but also its political-diplomatic influence).

The importance of China as a strategic partner (strategic market) will grow on the long term; it is estimated that approximately 90% of the global economic growth will be generated outside Europe. Besides, over 210 000 inventions were patented in China in 2013, which shows „progress in technology and the country's capacity for innovation"³⁵. This is a relation built on a win-win recipe, with promising results on both ends, where it's assumed that each one understands the other's needs in terms of interaction and cooperation against the backdrop of the realities and constraints of the times we live in. It's worth mentioning those aspects which have sometimes caused diplomatic frictions, the dialogue on certain „sensitive" topics leading to tense situations and approaches (like for example the episode related to Nicolas Sarkozy's presidential mandate, at a time when France was also holding the rotating presidency of the European Union³⁶, when he tried to „waltz" with a taboo topic of Chinese foreign policy, i.e. Dalai-Lama and Tibet³⁷; or the weapon embargo „game", very badly seen by China). To increase its chances of success in the negotiations, the European Union must act in a coordinated manner as so far the community bodies have served as a buffer between the - often competing - interests of the states under its umbrella and China. Let's remember that the first European Union - China Summit was only organised in 1998 in London, under the auspices of the second ASEM meeting and the visits of the Brussels leaders to China were relatively rare, compared to the bilateral trips of the heads of state and government of the member states³⁸.

Have the great world powers lost interest in the European Union? A short nostalgic retrospective does not comfort any pride. Nevertheless... At the end of the 19th century, the western influence on the world was at its peak, Europe imposed itself globally not so much due to its military superiority but especially due to the spread of ideas and transfer of institutions towards the other corners of the planet. In other words, by

³³ Approximately one third of the Chinese investments in Europe are in the Mediterranean countries and one tenth in Central and Eastern Europe.

³⁴ We could try to find some similarities with the *divide et impera* principle, quite often encountered in the political governing formulas of Ancient empires; the principles established by China individually with the European states are not very productive from the perspective of the European interest and from that of the central administration strategies.

³⁵ Wang Xin, 'Progress in innovation' as invention patents pass one-million mark, China Daily, February 27, 2013.

³⁶ In the second half of 2008.

³⁷ Pascale Nivelles, *Tibet: le supplice chinois de Sarkozy*, Libération, December 6, 2008, online source, consulted in November 2014, http://www.liberation.fr/monde/2008/12/06/tibet-le-supplice-chinois-de-sarkozy_294289.

³⁸ The former president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, was more active, from this point of view (Jacques Santer visited China in October 1998 for the first time after 12 years of break).

massively exporting the results of its political, social and economic thinking³⁹, and last but not least by its cultural influence. Exhausted and devastated by two world wars, accepting de facto the new geo-political configuration from the second half of the 20th century, the European continent found its balance on the path to European integration. The reduced influence of Europe in the world is visible these days just like the American supremacy in the space of global security is questioned by the emergence of regional power centres. We speculate a fashionable theory, but we must understand a simple fact: the international political configuration is always subject to whims, transitions from one situation to the next are extremely rapid and this requires a permanent return to the discussion table. However, this is not only for the relations between China and the European Union, but for all actors playing at the great powers table be it the United States, Russia, China, Europe, India, Japan and others.

The phantoms of the last century - a landscape dominated by revisionist theories, by aggressive geopolitics and by the run for militarisation - get back in the scene and insist in showing their muscles, counting on the same barbarian intimidation tactics: the right of the powerful and territorial expansion. In these changing circumstances, dominated by the psychological game between the big states seen both as economic entities in their race for resources and as mass destruction nuclear powers, the option of multilateralism and the consolidation of international law and of the international institutions provide the only reliable alternative. Therefore, the cultivation of mutual respect through public and cultural diplomacy instruments comes to support the geo-political, economic and strategic needs on a desperate lookout for better tolerance between nations and people, in order to avoid the escalation of a state of chaos (against the background of attempted armistices to the Ukrainian crisis ended with the imposition of successive sanctions without a major success in the treatment and actual defusing of the aggression - one of the reasons being precisely the different perspectives on Russia's "sin" and the unilateral approach⁴⁰ taken by the allies). "Keep the European Union united!" in front of a common threat which the member states feel with different intensities could also be the big challenge that the partners of the reunited European family might have to face in the near future.

The end of the '80s proved to be a time of change in the universal political history. Let's take a close look at what the Italian professor Giuseppe Schiavone was saying: "The East-West relationship has entered a phase of dramatic changes and it is difficult to tell at this moment whether the road will be smoother or even more rugged during the 1980s in a global environment that is itself far from clear"⁴¹. The text has explicit spatial and temporal references and it predisposes to remembrance and comparisons. Moreover, in terms of economy, "Western economies seem to be recovering only gradually from a sharp recession" while "on the Eastern side growth rates appear to have slackened and are expected to remain well below average. The resort to protectionist measures and import restrictions on the part of many governments, the spreading activities of multinationals and the worldwide economic slowdown will dampen the growth of international and East-West trade"⁴². In this case, doesn't the interpretation of history from a rather cyclical and factual perspective provide options to improve the forecast on the events to come? Isn't precisely this the *raison d'être* of the European Union, now enlarged to 28 member states, of the successive waves of European integration, to prevent precisely the possibility of a deadlock in the cooperation process?

Like in some vendetta of the revisionist powers, the theory of traditional geopolitical rivalries returning on the stage (East-West, USA-Russia, Western world - Arab world, liberal democracy vs. Communist societies) seems to be the leitmotif of the year of 2014. Let us resume: the Ukraine crisis representing a spontaneous inflammation of international relations in a revived Cold War atmosphere, and culminating with the occupa-

³⁹ René Albrecht-Carrié, *op.cit.*, p. 157.

⁴⁰ Due to the different stakes of bilateral relations with Russia (see the scandal about the selling of Mistral, the French war ships or about the delivery of military equipment and German technology, together with the complex issue of supply and transport of Russian gas in Europe). The president of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaite went as far as to denounce a policy of "mistralisation" (!) of the European affairs (Delfi – the Lithuania Tribune, 22 July 2014).

⁴¹ Giuseppe Schiavone (editor), *East-West relations. Prospects for the 1980s*, The Macmillan Press Ltd., London, 1982, p. xi.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

tion of Crimea by the Russian forces, aggressive strategic movements between China and Japan on the other side of the world⁴³ and a permanent centre of conflicts in the Middle East (the unfrozen Palestinian war⁴⁴, the Syrian humanitarian crisis, the Iran-Saudi Arabia duel for regional supremacy⁴⁵ doubled by the proclamation of the Islamic State seen as one of the biggest dangers of history⁴⁶). We are witnessing a whole series of aggressions and territorial claims, but especially a restructuring of the strategic alliances between states and of the global problems: the world order imposed by liberal democracies, considered as the best route to stability and prosperity (free trade, promotion of human rights by any means, more importance given to climate changes, the rule of law and the consecration of international right as a global governing axiom) is contested and the dispute reaches a critical point.

We do not have, at least not yet, a proposed model at a general macro level to replace the old one. No firm commitment to other planetary causes has emerged over the night and it seems very unlikely for this to be the purpose, given the reoccurrence of tensions and the reconfiguration of the links between the great powers. Taking advantage of an apparent weakening of American leadership⁴⁷, China, Russia, India, Brazil or Iran do not give the impression of trying to cooperate for a supreme purpose; they seem only to represent their commercial and economic interests as well as possible, to feed their sovereignty vocation for the future and to strengthen their regional dominance as much as possible⁴⁸, in opposition with the Western force⁴⁹. The emergence of a new International Development Bank and the setting up of a fund for emergency loans as a counterweight to the influence of western capital on the world markets (exercised through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) is seen by many analysts as a „challenge” to the current order. The New World Development Bank will have its headquarters in Shanghai, as China is also the country with the biggest contribution to the joint fund, respectively 41 billion dollars (6th BRICS Summit, Fortaleza, Brazil, July 2014).

Does the new model of world bank negotiated between the BRICS⁵⁰ countries in the first part of 2014 and which should start operating sometimes in 2016 come to support the fears about the antagonistic contractions of the global scene (being a piece in the puzzle of the confrontation between developed and developing countries, which the other actors are forced to join involuntarily according to the criterion „good globalization vs. bad globalization”⁵¹) or is this just the extra imagination of the future structure of interna-

⁴³ The turning point seems to be the nationalisation of the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands by Japan: „Before 2012, many analysts used the term ‚hot economics, cold politics’ to describe Sino-Japanese relations; but after 2012 it gradually became ‚cold economics, cold politics’, though the bilateral economic relationship is still solid overall”, see Dingding Chen, *China and Japan’s ‘double cold’ trap. Crisis control should be the top priority in Sino-Japanese relations*, The Diplomat, Nov 01, 2014, online edition, consulted in November 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/11/china-and-japans-double-cold-trap/>.

⁴⁴ Very recently, Sweden became the first EU member state to recognise officially the independence of the Palestinian state (although previously Hungary, Slovakia and Poland had done the same gesture, but before having joined the Union, Euronews, Oct 30); its decision contributed to increased tensions in the region and relaunched the discussions about a coherent (?) position of European foreign policy with regard to the Middle East status quo. Ishaan Tharoor, *Map: The countries that recognize Palestine as a state*, The Washington Post, Nov 7, 2014, online source, consulted in November 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/11/07/map-the-countries-that-recognize-palestine-as-a-state/?tid=sm_fb.

⁴⁵ S. Azmat Hassan, *Saudi Arabia Versus Iran*, The Huffington Post, 16/05/2014 (updated 16/07/2014), online source, consulted in November 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/s-azmat-hassan/saudi-arabia-iran_b_5332879.html.

⁴⁶ Zachary Keck, *Indonesian Military Chief: ‘ISIS is the Worst Idea in History’*, The Diplomat, Nov 01, 2014, online source, consulted in November 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/11/indonesian-military-chief-isis-is-the-worst-idea-in-history/>.

⁴⁷ „The journey from death threats to diplomacy is both a triumph of U.S. statecraft and a symbol of its declining power”, Mark Leonard, *Decline of U.S. influence means Iran and Saudi Arabia may just have to get along — eventually*, blogs.reuters.com, June 25, 2014, online source, consulted in November 2014, <http://blogs.reuters.com/mark-leonard/2014/06/25/as-iraq-falls-apart-new-opportunities-for-peace-are-created/>

⁴⁸ G. John Ikenberry, Michael Mastanduno (ed.), *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*, Columbia University Press, USA, 2003, p. 90.

⁴⁹ The Sino-Russian relations developed based on older ideological affinities, some sort of legacy of the past redefining perceptions on the future („They have been motivated less by shared material interests than by a common sense of national identity that defines itself in opposition to the West and in support of how each views the legacy of traditional communism”, Gilbert Rozman, *Asia for the Asians. Why Chinese - Russian Friendship Is Here To Stay*, Foreign Affairs, Oct 29, 2014, online source, consulted in November 2014, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142305/gilbert-rozman/asia-for-the-asians>).

⁵⁰ Brazil, India, China and South Africa. Together they host 40% of the global population and generate approximately 20% of the world gross domestic product.

⁵¹ James Corbett, *Meet the BRICS ‘New Development Bank’*, The Corbett Report, 09/29/2014, online source, consulted in October 2014, <http://www.corbettreport.com/meet-the-brics-new-development-bank/>.

tional relations?⁵². Not lastly, the emergence of this second financial pillar may be accepted as a sign of world democratization, speculating on the authority crisis based on the following logic: now we can choose? Or *bien au contraire*, who's not with us, is against us, the climate becoming even more vulnerable to deviations? The collective memory of war and its planetary devastations is today rather weak, so the pragmatic orientation of international politics is translated visibly in the practice of relations between the states. The future is impossible to read, but the consistency of multilateralism seems to be tried hard: countries - be it smaller or bigger - are no longer interested in choosing one side, but rather in keeping a distance from both sides, for as long as possible. However, detachment does not provide the ideal solution. What yields stability in a global order is, before anything else, the balance of forces legitimated by the proper functioning of international law structures, in parallel with the improvement of the cooperation relations based on joint advantages.

EUROPE, CHINA AND THE GLOBAL GOVERNANCE: DOES LOVE EXIST WITHOUT PASSION?

In this context of fierce competition for supremacy, the European Union has a message to send and not only to its traditional allies. The effects of the Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), for instance, illustrate the willingness to open up towards the others, widening the intervention pool as the South and the East cease being just coordinates on a map and become states connected to a network. On the other hand, the success of European integration so far, even under the deep impact of the social-economic and financial crisis that has been haunting it for several years, proves precisely that wish of stability and long term vision which is so much needed. In spite of the development gaps between the regions, its internal construction (treaties - institutions - policies), together with the decision mechanisms which have improved gradually with the integration process, have the power of conferring quite some trust to the European citizens in its economic and political future⁵³. The European Union has, therefore, its own recipe of macro-regional governing and administration (with reference mainly to the relation between its member states and to the fact that the Lisbon Treaty is trying to favour the best representation of the small state interests, but also of the interests of a minority group of states⁵⁴, in order to get a satisfying agreement on the important matters) which could become a source of inspiration in international relations. But... what would be the weak chain link in this movie broadcasted in the world's chancelleries?

European diplomacy is still a puzzle made up of unconvincing pieces. The European External Action Service (EEAS or EAS) has been operational for little time⁵⁵: it was launched officially at the end of 2010 while national diplomacies already have a long history of bilateral and multilateral relations with third states. According to official data, the EEAS counts a few thousand employees working in the central building and adjacent structures in Brussels, plus the staff of the 140 Delegations of the European Union implanted all over the world. A genuine army of civil servants-diplomats serving the community's interest and prestige, European managers but also civil staff from the member states, covering the most diverse fields: foreign and security

⁵² Very recently, China also launched the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (together with 21 other partner states), considered a regional bank financing infrastructure projects in all of Asia. The initiative was criticized by the United States who argued China's inability to provide international governance and transparency standards (see Shannon Van Sant, Voice of America, Oct 24, 2014, online source, consulted in October 2014, <http://www.voanews.com/content/china-launches-new-asia-development-bank/2494903.html>).

⁵³ More than half of the European citizens (53%) are optimistic about the future of the EU, the special Eurobarometer „European 2014“, The European Commission – Press Release, Brussels, May 2014, online source, consulted in October 2014, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-543_fr.htm?locale=EN; http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_special_419_400_en.htm#415.

⁵⁴ Art. 237-243 on the functioning of the Council of the European Union, from the *Treaty on the functioning of the European Union* signed in Lisbon on December 13th 2007 and effective as of 1 December 2009.

⁵⁵ It is useful to access the EEAS website, the online database, consulted in November 2014, http://www.eeas.europa.eu/background/origins-of-the-european-external-action-service/index_en.htm.

policy, trade, development aid, participation in international organizations, prevention and management of crisis, global environmental challenges, fight against poverty, human rights. Could there be too many strategic elements and too few realistic ways of intervention? For a decade (1999-2009), Javier Solana, the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy⁵⁶ has tried to give a unitary, coherent character to the EU external action and defence policy. Under his mandate, the Institute of Security Studies, the European Defence Agency and the Political and Security Committee (CoPS, a permanent body of the European Union) saw the light of day and he was also the initiator of the only European Security Strategy adopted in 2003 whose revised version was presented to the European Council five years later. Javier Solana's contribution and legacy resurface in a final appeal which is also his political testament: "Coopérez, il n'y a pas d'excuses pour ne pas coopérer!"⁵⁷, speaking clearly about the centrifugal tendencies of the member states.

At first glance, EU's foreign policy ambitions are mainly national; it is only after the satisfaction of specific interests that they move on to a general commitment based on overall objectives. France will never give up its foreign policy⁵⁸ is the categorical answer given by Françoise Nicolas, an expert of the French International Relations Institute (IFRI)⁵⁹. Nor is it required to. France holds one of the five seats in the UN Security Council and its DOM-TOM possessions (*France d'outre mer*), together with the influence it exercises on its former colonies in political, economic or cultural terms (and we could punctually recall the phenomenon of Francophonie, an important agent - French is also the sixth most frequently spoken language in the world, impacting over around 220 million inhabitants⁶⁰) give it a relatively widespread geographical presence. But the limited resources that each individual actor has at its disposal in the global game may impose a complementarity of the EU-member states foreign policy vision. It is certain that for now we are not performing at the height of our aspirations and potential energy. Nor could we ask China or another external partner (strategic or not) to take us seriously, as long as our own decision mechanism and internal organization formula are still in construction. In his governing program, the new president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker also brings to the table foreign policy as the ninth out of ten priority directions for the following years: "The crisis in Ukraine and the worrying situation in the Middle East show how important it is for Europe to be united in terms of foreign affairs"⁶¹. A strong Union means a more synergic Union in terms of security and defence, with a better coercive efficiency.

Looking at things from this perspective, China's strategic European partners remain bilateral: Western states with a solid position like Germany, France, the United Kingdom or the northern countries maintain and establish their own priorities in the economic, cultural and political relations⁶² developed with the Asian

⁵⁶ Prior to this mandate, Javier Solana held the position of General Secretary of NATO between 1995 and 1999.

⁵⁷ Maroun Labaki, *Javier Solana: Mon testament politique*, Le Soir, 10 décembre 2009, online source, consulted in November 2014, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/FR/sghr_int/111867.pdf.

⁵⁸ Charles de Gaulle said it explicitly in 1944: France must possess diplomatic action instruments that match its destiny "in order for it to start playing again the role of one of the world's biggest states". „Bref, à mon sens, la France ne peut être la France sans la grandeur", see *Mémoires (de guerre)*, Gallimard, Paris, 2000.

⁵⁹ Françoise Nicolas, Alice Ekman: „China-France/EU Relations: Economic and Political Perspectives", conference held at Fudan University (Shanghai), School of International Relations and Public Affairs - SIRPA, on 17 November 2014.

⁶⁰ "Due to its demographic growth, the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF) estimates that the number of French speakers will exceed 700 million in 2015, with 80% of them located in Africa. The weight of francophones in the world population will pass from 3% to 8% according to the *Report on the state of French in the world*, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 08/01/2013, online source, consulted in November 2014, <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/politique-etrangere-de-la-france/francophonie-et-langue-francaise/pourquoi-promouvoir-la-langue/article/etat-des-lieux-du-francais-dans-le>.

⁶¹ Jean-Claude Juncker, *A New Start for Europe: My Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change. Political Guidelines for the next European Commission*, European Parliament, Strasbourg, 15 July 2014, online source, consulted in October 2014, http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/docs/pg_en.pdf.

⁶² With reference to disproportionate representation in an essential field like education, a domain favouring closeness between peoples and implicitly facilitating the establishment of cordial bilateral relations: at Fudan University, one of the five most prestigious universities in China, the privileged partnerships concluded with Germany, represented by the German Academic Exchange Service, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Freie Universität Berlin, Universität Hamburg, etc. or with the northern countries (Nordic Centre is financed by the governments of the northern states and it comprises a network of 26 Northern Universities from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), offering various scholarships, joint and research academic programs, student exchanges and mobilities are extremely visible. In exchange, the Centre for European Studies does not seem to be

giant, doubled here and there by the intervention of EU's cooperation instruments. For a couple of years now, some states from Eastern Europe such as Hungary, Greece or Romania have also carried out a vivid campaign of rapprochement towards China. We could bring to the discussion a recent diplomatic event: the United Kingdom is presented as the most attractive European country for Chinese investors, while also being the second European investor in China (after Germany)⁶³. The relations of friendship and hope for a common, more fruitful future were reiterated by the British Prime Minister quite explicitly both during his visit in China (December 2013): "No country in the world is more open to Chinese investment than the UK"⁶⁴, and in London, on the occasion of the UK-China Summit (June 2014) when David Cameron assured Li Keqiang of his government's support in strengthening the relation with the EU: "The UK will continue to stand for opening up trade in the EU; for progress towards an EU-China trade deal"⁶⁵. This example seems illustrative of the level of communication between Europe and China, although we could very well extend our comparison to other global players.

A report of the European Parliament speaks of the international pressure and warns about these errors of conduct, suggesting possible ways of action: "European interests are best served when we speak with one voice. The competition will be even fiercer, with China having already established 300 Confucius Centres (1 000 planned by 2020) to practice cultural diplomacy, and the rise of emerging powers such as India. The United States has historically had a strong cultural presence in the world, which is now slightly declining but remains powerful. We need bold and ambitious policies now"⁶⁶. Few know that on September 27th 2014 all the Confucius Institutes in the world, coordinated by the General Headquarters - Hanban - in Beijing have celebrated the first historic decade of success: today, China has no less than 472 institutes open in universities and 732 Confucius classes operating in primary and secondary schools in 123 countries and regions. 50,000 teachers and volunteers ensure the educational process for almost one million trainees worldwide⁶⁷. Of course, such figures and development are impressive; Confucius Institutes make up an essential platform for communication, multiple cultural experiences and promotion of positive relations between China and the other people.

As for a short parallel between China and the European Union, the map of Confucius Institutes shows us 138 structures which operate in almost all the states of geographic Europe, together with 178 Confucius classes spread in 22 countries. The external action service disposes of a network made up of 140 delegations which represent the overall interests of the EU in the world, according to their job description. The means are mainly political-diplomatic. Are these enough to create a positive image, to send a trusted, unitary message? All these prove, once more, that we are in a global, open, fierce competition in economic and geopolitical terms and the machinery of internal synchronisation/harmonisation must be understood and applied as such. A new beginning seems to be ensured: "Not only for Europe, as the Commission's slogan says, but also for Foreign Policy", declares Federica Mogherini, freshly appointed head of European diplomacy. "If we want to be effective in the world, we need to be effective starting from here, from Brussels. [...] So, we will try to share our common vision and make it owned by all the 28 Member States". Because the European Union's foreign policy may only refer to one interest, reuniting the interests of all member states, "clear and united messages that will help us orientate our common action"⁶⁸.

encouraged by either side (there is a theme course entitled „China-EU Relations“ which is trying to cover this dimension of the cooperation).

⁶³ *Foreign direct investment in China declines*, The Wall Street Journal, June 17, 2014, online source, consulted in November 2014, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/foreign-direct-investment-in-china-declines-1402980999>.

⁶⁴ *David Cameron promises China 'growth partnership'*, BBC News, Dec 03, 2013, online source, consulted in November 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-25176613>.

⁶⁵ Information published on the official website of the British government (June 2014).

⁶⁶ *Report on the cultural dimensions of the EU's external actions*, European Parliament, 31 March 2011, Committee on Culture and Education, Rapporteur: Marietje Schaake, 2010/2161(INI), online source, consulted in October 2014, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A7-2011-0112&language=EN>.

⁶⁷ *Culture and Communication. Confucius Institutes celebrate a decade of reaching out to the world*, Beijing Review, Nov 13, 2014.

⁶⁸ *Remarks by High Representative Federica Mogherini after today's meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council*, Brussels, 17/11/2014,

We could look at the EU as a website with the right interface, the right graphic symbols, and beautiful welcoming colours, but with a series of links accessed by numerous visitors which are still being developed and optimised so that it cannot send an overall signal of consistency and stability. Countless official statements speak of how difficult it is for Europe to speak with one voice when it comes to foreign affairs. But for its political survival, it is essential that at some point it starts to, although forced by the circumstances rather than through an emancipation of its consciousness. “We must work against this war dynamics in Europe” declared the German professor of Polish origins Michael Brzoska in front of his European and Asian students, when invited at Fudan University for a lecture on the topic: “The Ukraine Crisis: Prelude to a New Cold War in Europe?”⁶⁹. And the former European leaders Tony Blair and Jacques Chirac affirmed, in a joint statement almost two decades ago: “[The European Union] must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in response to international crises” (Saint-Malo Dec 1998⁷⁰). But progress is slow, as if still waiting for the wisdom given by age...

Last but not least, the European Union partners must be “taught” and convinced to accept this unitary approach in international cooperation as the most efficient way of deepening relations with Europe, counting on the unique nature of the European construction and on the values it stubbornly promotes since the time of its creation: reconciliation, democracy, fundamental freedoms, rule of law, respect for the United Nations and a fair respect of international law, human dignity, equality and solidarity, universality and indivisibility of human rights. At any negotiations with its external partners, the European Union promotes the same set of principles which are the basis of its emergence and creation, setting the basis of the relation between the member states. Otherwise said, the European Union exports as ideas of political philosophy and good practices in the art of governing precisely what it has been experimenting and developing successfully since over sixty years. No longer than two years ago, the Norwegian Committee would argue that the decision to award the Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union relied on its role of stability factor, making so that “from a continent of war, a large part of Europe was transformed into a continent of peace” (Oslo, 12 Oct 2012)⁷¹. As a *sine qua non* condition, the updating or reinventing of the European external action strategy can only be an act of will of the states, in the unsafe atmosphere dominating the global security environment.

With a population a bit over 500 million inhabitants, a surface of 4 459 980 km² and a gross domestic product estimated at 17 350 billion dollars (World Bank 2013)⁷² the EU leadership is actively contributing to the peaceful and constructive solving of conflicts and worries in the contemporary world. Lacking a reform of the security and defence component, in the framework of international diplomatic relations, the authority of the European Union is not given by its military capacity, by the number of soldiers or by the amount of weapons at its disposal, like in the case of the United States, Russia or China (hard security). Rather we could see a niche in the responsibility taken over firmly in punctual items of the global agenda such as the fight against climate change and the protection of the environment, eradication of poverty, sustainable development, defence of human rights and citizen freedoms, the fight against nuclear proliferation. In a critical situation, the availability to negotiate, the capacity of mediator and the post-operator role undertaken by the European Union may be decisive in the saving of human lives, material goods, cultures and civilisations. And in the extreme case of the outbreak of a conflict, the provision of humanitarian aid, development assistance, technical

141117_03_en, online source, consulted in November 2014, http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2014/141117_03_en.htm.

⁶⁹ Presentation held at the Fudan University (Shanghai), School of International Relations and Public Affairs - SIRPA, on 6 November 2014.

⁷⁰ *Joint Declaration issued at the British-French Summit*, Saint-Malo, France, 3-4 December 1998, EU Institute for Security Studies, February 2000, online source, consulted in November 2014, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/French-British%20Summit%20Declaration,%20Saint-Malo,%201998%20-%20EN.pdf>. Idea resumed in the Conclusion of the European Council in Köln, June 1999, online source, consulted in November 2014, http://eeas.europa.eu/csdp/about-csdp/cologne_council/index_en.htm.

⁷¹ *Announcement: The Nobel Peace Prize for 2012*, online source, consulted in October 2014, http://nobelpeaceprize.org/en_GB/laureates/laureates-2012/announce-2012/.

⁷² Eurostat & World Bank, online databases, consulted in October 2014.

expertise (soft security) may be even more efficient than the sending of intervention troops whose force of action - justified under one form or another - will only solve the problem temporarily.

There are two things that I'm always buying when I go to Brussels, one of the professors of Sino-European relations would tell us, among theories and concepts: chocolate and books. One helps the heart, the other one the mind, I'd add. Here are some other precious things that Europe has to offer to the world! The Union remains the most important global stability factor, the most important ambassador of the respect of fundamental human rights and also of the principle of state sovereignty, the most important contributor to the development aid, the world's biggest market with a knowledge-based economy and knowledge transfer. The development of a "Europe brand" in a global competition⁷³ not just in commercial, scientific, cultural or artistic terms, but also in terms of international political order, is imperiously necessary. Before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disappearance of the Iron Curtain which separated ideologically the western world from the eastern European side of the continent, the closeness between the United States and China in the '70s was seen as one of the greatest diplomatic successes of modern history⁷⁴, contributing both to counterbalancing the hegemony of the Soviet Union in Asia (since its foundation in 1949 the People's Republic of China avoided to become a satellite of the Russians, Mao's revolutionary doctrine setting the basis for its own communist organisation system⁷⁵) and to protecting America's foreign policy from isolation.

Today, the preservation of a strong Europe⁷⁶ must be seen as a balancing factor in the definition of rules at macro-regional level, being situated among the classical models of governing and cooperation (balance of power) within the international system; subject, but also object of the new strategies determined by the interaction between superpowers and the perverse effects of the world systemic crisis. In the context of this lack of real power (in terms of military capacities) and also of a reduced interest of the member states to concretely support a common foreign and security policy, for now the EU keeps its qualities of "lien"⁷⁷, in a register dominated by major hostile ambitions. Against the backdrop of the recent tensions in the relations between the same two traditional blocks on the East-West axis (Russia vs. the United States and NATO⁷⁸) and of the successive attempted armistices in the Ukrainian crisis, the leadership in Washington suggests that it understood well the decisive role that the emerging powers - and especially China - may play in the global geo-politics: "and we welcome the growth of these nations to their global responsibilities and to the assumption of increased global ability to make a difference", declared John Kerry⁷⁹ during a friendly discourse addressed to his Chinese partner at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, DC⁸⁰. Like on a brand new chessboard, a prophetic vision has no meaning, pragmatism or compromise around the readjustment of the strategies

⁷³ Report on the cultural dimensions of the EU's external actions, EP, *op.cit.*

⁷⁴ Raymond Cohen, *International Politics. The rules of the game*, Longman Group Limited, USA, 1981, p. 31.

⁷⁵ The word "maoism" does not exist in Chinese; they use the phrase: "the thinking of Mao Zedong" (he tried a pragmatic approach of the previous ideological variants [„-ism"], adapting the scientific theories to China's real situation). The "Reformer" Deng Xiaoping initiated an ample openness towards the United States, its modernization policies being continued under one form or the other by Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao.

⁷⁶ A partial disintegration of the European Union materialized by the United Kingdom exiting the family of states, for instance, would be catastrophic not so much internally but for its perception to the outside world, for its credibility in front of its external partners (speaking of the position statements of Mrs Angela Merkel, as a reaction to the multiple faces of British exceptionalism, in *Der Spiegel*, taken over by the EU Observer, Nov 03, 2014).

⁷⁷ About Mrs Catherine Ashton, the former head of diplomacy in Brussels, an Iranian official declared: „She has to go to consult with the representatives of the world powers on every minor detail. Nobody is under the illusion that she has any authority to decide on her own. She is no more than a liaison, and at that she is very effective", according to Anshel Pfeffer, *Ashton, activist turned diplomat at center of nuclear talks*, Haaretz, Nov 24, 2013, taken over by the EU Observer, Dec 01, 2014.

⁷⁸ Unlike in the first half of the previous century, the states' security options and guarantees, as effect of multilateral diplomacy, but also as a consequence of the waves of globalized economy, are more extended and with different connotations in the international geo-political register.

⁷⁹ State Secretary in the Obama administration (1 February 2013).

⁸⁰ John Kerry, *Remarks on U.S. – China Relations*, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Washington, DC, U.S. Department of State, Nov 04, 2014, online source, consulted in November 2014, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/11/233705.htm>.

which contribute to the identification of new possible schemes, but also to the emergence of new rules of the game, as the game progresses.

The Chinese relations with the US develop in a rapid rhythm, also imposed by the countless diplomatic challenges which the two states are subject to and subject each other. The stake is simple:

“The Asia Pacific is one of the most promising places on the planet⁸¹, and America’s future and security and prosperity are closely and increasingly linked to that region”. And the White House diplomat goes on in the same register: “but it is clear that coming from the different places we come from, China and the United States, we actually do have the opportunity as two leading powers to find solutions to major challenges facing the world today. And if we can cooperate together and help show the way, that will help bring other nations along and establish the norms for the rest of the world”. The uni-multipolarism from the end of last century⁸², built around the mission undertaken voluntarily by the United States and dominated by the figure of America in the collective security space is increasingly losing weight in the face of a circumstantial bipolarism created on the USA-China line⁸³ with the declared purpose of representing most effectively the interests of the parties and improving commitment for “stability, prosperity, and peace around the equator, from pole to pole, throughout this world we live in” (J. K.).

In spite of all this, in the last six years the relations between China and the United States have become unstable: “There is now a rising concern that the mutual mistrust will develop into mutual strategic misjudgements and mistakes”⁸⁴. In parallel with the mutual elimination of suspicions and the building of new political-military Sino-American relations⁸⁵ - a relatively sensitive chapter, when it comes to negotiating equality positions, China continued to get close to Russia, a neighbour country and older acquaintance with common ideological foundations⁸⁶, seen as a potential ally of Beijing, in the plan to provide an alternative to the international order promoted by the “imperialist force of the West”. “We see how quickly Asia Pacific has been developing over the past few decades. As a Pacific power, Russia will use this huge potential comprehensively. Everyone knows the leaders and the drivers of global economic development. Many of them are our sincere friends and strategic partners”, declares Vladimir Putin in his annual message from the tribune of Russia’s Federal Assembly⁸⁷. The pragmatic character of the relations being created becomes obvious; the geo-political arena brings in players with rational performances, in a new variant⁸⁸ of alliances and “coexistence” compared to the Cold War days. The signing of “friendly” treaties and bilateral agreements does not eliminate the individual, fierce competition between states, between allies of the same side; on the contrary, it is the contradicting interests that stand out instead of a convergent vision on sustainable development and crisis management. The real battle concerns, before anything else, macro-regional supremacy, both based on economic considerations and on strategic-military components. In a confusing hurry, China wishes to confirm its great power status, its condition of decisive factor in the management of world peace and security.

⁸¹ „After years of rapid development, the Asia-Pacific has become the most dynamic region of the world, and it has never been as important as it is today in the global landscape” (*The 22nd APEC Economic Leaders’ Declaration*, Beijing, 12 November 2014).

⁸² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Lonely Superpower*, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1999, online source, consulted in November 2014, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/54797/samuel-p-huntington/the-lonely-superpower>.

⁸³ Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, „The Bipolar World of 2025: US and China”, conference held at the Fudan University (Shanghai), School of International Relations and Public Affairs - SIRPA, on 13 November 2014.

⁸⁴ Zheng Wang, *US - China relations: The danger of strategic misjudgment*, *The Diplomat*, Nov 8, 2014, online source, consulted in November 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/11/us-china-relations-the-danger-of-strategic-misjudgment/>.

⁸⁵ „New Sino-US major-power relations with no conflict, no confrontations, equality, mutual benefit, cooperation and win-win”, *Think Tank Reports 2014*, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, p. 65.

⁸⁶ Gilbert Rozman, *op.cit.*

⁸⁷ *Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly*, The Kremlin, Moscow, Dec 04, 2014, online source, consulted in December 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/23341>.

⁸⁸ „In the multipolar world of the 21st century, the major powers will inevitably compete, clash, and coalesce with each other in various permutations and combinations. Such a world, however, will lack the tension and conflict between the superpower and the major regional powers that are the defining characteristic of a uni-multipolar world”, wrote Samuel P. Huntington over 15 years ago (*The Lonely Superpower*, *op.cit.*).

TEMPTATIONS OF THE FUTURE. DYNAMICS OF DUPLICITOUS FRIENDSHIPS

The multiple convenience marriages - suggesting a contract based on mutual winnings⁸⁹ - which China is celebrating with its partners does nothing but feed the power ambitions of the Asian giant (reflected in the combination between more security and more rapid development, “China’s twin goals”⁹⁰), in a game of global influences⁹¹ which it seems to start mastering quite well. “Will the land- and sea-based Silk Roads be limited to a string of bilateral agreements between China and individual countries, or between China and regional groups like the European Union and ASEAN? Is there a grander vision, such as a regional free trade zone incorporating all the Silk Road countries? Or will China be the tie that binds it all together, with no special agreements directly linking, say, Kazakhstan and Germany?” is asking himself a political analyst⁹². Is the Silk Road an answer to the restlessness and needs of the current world? Or is it just an attempt of China to impose its economic dominance in an extended regional register, counting on skilful diplomacy and on increasingly clever persuasion instruments, in its aspiration towards universality? Recently, the military closeness between China and Russia, in parallel with the declarations of reinforcement of the economic and strategic cooperation (the energy agreements package and the massive export of Russian gas to China) reflect the trend of occasional repositioning counterbalancing the shadow of some common worries⁹³ in the short - and maybe even medium - term.

Many observers ask themselves whether China’s internationalization policy is more than a reply to the dominance exercised all this time by the United States (Washington consensus) with different methods of action. The attempt to impose a new global peace system is especially carried out around the “Chinese model” (Beijing consensus) built on the theory of the “win-win” cooperation relation - promoting “equality and mutual benefit” according to the official statements of premier Li Keqiang⁹⁴ - and inspired by a similar historical experience (“a pattern of South-South cooperation”⁹⁵). In this sense, the Chinese investments and the transcontinental dialogue initiatives launched in Africa⁹⁶, the Middle East or in the Asia-Pacific area are countless and they are all successful. The states must therefore get accustomed with the Chinese interests (“A wider Chinese vision for a more integrated Asia, with China at its center”) in the light of immediate economic benefits⁹⁷, speculating the window of opportunity left open by the weakness displayed by America⁹⁸. But first we need to clarify one aspect: do they wish to reform the international system, the older regulatory institutions or to replace them? China comes with its own values and tempts the global business and security environment with a pragmatic “kitchen”, with simple dishes which must convince by themselves, through the varied taste of the resulted product, not necessarily through the varnish of the wrapping.

⁸⁹ *How can the world be win-win? China is answering the question* (Chinese), Xinhua, online source, consulted in November 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2014-05/08/c_1110604423.htm.

⁹⁰ Gaston J. Sigur, Young C. Kim, *Japanese and U.S. Policy in Asia*, Praeger Publishers, USA, 1982, p. 140.

⁹¹ „The Chinese are thus involved in a balancing act: showing strength while maintaining the tranquility crucial to continued economic growth”, Avery Goldstein, reviewed by Lucian W. Pye, *Rising to the challenge: China’s grand strategy and international security*, Foreign Affairs, January/February 2006, online source, consulted in November 2014, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/61342/lucian-w-pye/rising-to-the-challenge-chinas-grand-strategy-and-international->

⁹² Shannon Tiezzi, *China’s ‘New Silk Road’ Vision Revealed*, The Diplomat, May 09, 2014, online source, consulted in November 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/05/chinas-new-silk-road-vision-revealed/>.

⁹³ A de facto anti-western alliance in a “post-Cold War” era, invoking the continuation of the West’s fencing politics (see this year’s discourse of Vladimir Putin to the Federal Assembly of Russia: „The policy of containment was not invented yesterday. It has been carried out against our country for many years, always, for decades, if not centuries. In short, whenever someone thinks that Russia has become too strong or independent, these tools are quickly put into use”, The Kremlin, Moscow, Dec 4, 2014).

⁹⁴ *Chinese premier’s Africa tour set to promote China-Africa relations*, Xinhua, April 30, 2014, online source, consulted in November 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-04/30/c_133302238.htm.

⁹⁵ Ewelina Róza Lubieniecka, *Chinese Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa: Can the Beijing Consensus be Explained Under World-Systems Analysis?*, Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences, September 2014, vol. 7, No. 3, Fudan University and Springer-Verlag GmbH Berlin Heidelberg, p. 434.

⁹⁶ China has become the biggest commercial partner of Africa since 2009, bilateral exchanges amounting to no less than 210 billion dollars (2013).

⁹⁷ President Xi Jinping announced the setting up of a 40 billion dollars fund to support the infrastructure investments in the partner countries of the project „One Belt, One Road”, Xinhua, Nov 08, 2014, online source, consulted in November 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-11/08/c_133774993.htm.

⁹⁸ „The US is seen as distracted: Ukraine and the Middle East and a generally weak presidency”, Brian Spegele, *China takes carrot-and-stick approach to dealing with neighbors*, The Wall Street Journal, Nov 12, 2014, online source, consulted in November 2014, http://online.wsj.com/articles/china-woos-neighbors-with-carrot-and-stick-approach-1415843541?mod=WSJ_Latest-Headlines.

Sustainable development means responsible needs-answering actions, efficient now but with a long impact, which should not alter the next generations' effort to grow⁹⁹. The benefits of conjugated cooperation are obvious. So are the risks, in the case of singular reactions to the vital challenges of humanity: excessive deterioration of the environment, the human rights and citizen freedoms package, legislative transparency and institutional modernization, the "rule of law" vs "rule by law" dilemma, the fight against corruption, food safety, cyber-espionage, all of these still need common strategic approaches and concessions between the parties. There are so many initiatives to organize and control the international politics system, that it is hard for us to keep in mind not just the substance and the long term vision of the projects, but even the initials of the cohort of organizations and intergovernmental and cooperation ensembles. And complexity does nothing but stress even further the deviations and the solution crisis related to the world's current tendency to divide, to split, to reallocate. A wise proverb says that in life, among others, one can consider himself fulfilled only after having planted a tree. I would paraphrase that in the current geo-political context: when you reach a critical point, when you can no longer make it through, go and plant a tree! We could think outside the box using precisely this incentive.

In sync with the world leaders present in the Chinese capital for the two extremely busy days of the high level economic meeting of the Asia-Pacific Forum. The world's most powerful three leaders, presidents Xi Jinping, Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin were surprised practicing gardening together and thus contributing, through their gesture, to the maintenance of the "International Friendship Park". Once more they have shown not just an enviable physical condition, but also appetite for the show biz industry. Intricate are the paths of diplomacy. Let's end with this most unusual story from the event: „Not even the three most powerful men in the world are above a little hard labour. Leaders visiting China's capital enjoyed some fresh-ish air yesterday while shovelling dirt onto trees at the Beijing Friendship Forest in yet another fun-filled APEC event that welcomed a bit of diplomatic mingling and some more weird photo opportunities. [...] It's been fun, APEC. For us the viewers, at least.”¹⁰⁰ Some things cannot be put into images. If and how will the "great dream" of Xi Jinping manage to produce effects in the plan of global politics remains one of the challenges and... vulnerabilities of the future. While waiting for the next environmental summit taking place in 2015 in Paris¹⁰¹, China, the world's greatest polluter, proposes to massively cut down on its global gas emissions (compared to the 2005 level). A commitment undertaken in solidarity by the United States, as well, while the European Union has already announced a greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of at least 40% for the 2030 time horizon. A useful exercise of connection to the multitude of universal fears. Let's hope that the international system gets out of the sphere of a reality show and will be able to provide real alternatives to the polarization and instability characterizing the current world order, against the background of a new wave of regional crisis and of the new central role assumed by secondary powers.

Translation of the articles: "Europa, China și guvernarea globală. Mirajul Drumului Mătășii" and "Noi considerații despre relațiile sino-europene, din perspectiva jocului de putere global", *Studia Securitatis*, "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, No. 1 & 2 / 2015, ISSN: 1843-1925.

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Shanghai, 23 November 2014

Revised and updated: Sibiu, 23 January 2015

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⁹⁹ *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future* („Brundtland Report”), UN documents, October 1987, online source, consulted in October 2014, <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ *APEC leaders get their hands dirty while planting trees in Beijing*, Shanghaiist – NetEase, Nov 12, 2014, online source, consulted in November 2014, http://shanghaiist.com/2014/11/12/look_apec_leaders_get_their_hands_d.php.

¹⁰¹ The 21st Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 11th meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, Paris, from 30 november to 11 december 2015.

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