

Argument: The EU has been a favoured vehicle and ‘power multiplier’ for the pursuit of French interests in many regions and in third countries. In explaining the foreign policies of France, approaches which do not factor in the EU are inadequate. Even in its *domaines réservés* (traditional spheres of influence). French foreign policy is increasingly conceived and contextualised in the larger “whole” of European foreign policy. The overall trend is convergence— a result of top-down, bottom-up and lateral Europeanization pressures continuously interacting over time.

I Approaches to understanding French Foreign Policy

French foreign policy is usually explained as that of (i) a medium European power with clear foreign policy goals of security and independence (Grosser 89, Doise and Vaïsse 92, Bozo 98); (ii) as that of a Gaullist state with great-power reflexes using the EU as an extension of national foreign policy (Menon 96, Hoffmann 99, 2000a); and sometimes (iii) through institutional and decision-making analyses (eg. Kessler 99). These works present French foreign policy as a product of domestic decision-making in a rational, self-interested state. Other works increasingly emphasise (iv) the input and impact of EU foreign policy making mechanisms (esp. Lequesne 93, also de la Serre 96, Védrine 96 and Blunden 2001). Policies in France’s traditional spheres of influence have undergone significant adaptation towards multilateral approaches. This trend is evident in the Middle East (Kodmani-Darwish 95) and even in Africa.

Most studies stress how France has opted for a “strong Europe with weak institutions”. However, these institutions have steadily strengthened and while France may have been a founding member of the EC, the French have also had to adapt to unanticipated convergence pressures of the overarching structure of European foreign policy, consisting of (i) national policies, (ii) CFSP and (iii) Community policies (Hill 93). Incremental policy coordination, common positions, declarations and increasingly, common policies and actions place convergence pressures on member states.

European Foreign Policy is more institutionalised in the EU’s immediate and near-abroad priority areas and issue-areas, in particular Central and Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean/Middle East, and external trade (especially negotiations with other trade powers and in WTO). The European Union’s involvement in these geographic and issue areas has been the subject of many analyses. While East Asia is a region of growing interest for French and European foreign policy, the countries in this region could be considered “least likely” target countries for a coherent EU region-to-region approach. In effect, habits of cooperation, consultation and coordination on the EU’s policy in the East Asian region are relatively new and not well established, aside from the EU-ASEAN relationship (Mols 90, Maull et al 98).

II Is there a French Policy in Asia?

Commercial motives often identified as the driving force behind French and EU policies in East Asia. (Godement 95, Wellons 94, Santos 95). French policy is usually explained as being inspired by French mercantilist ambitions in the rapidly growing markets in the greater China area, the NIEs and in Southeast Asia (at least until the Asian economic crisis of 1997-98). However, this economic account by itself is too one-dimensional and does not capture a complex relationship that includes disagreements over eg. human rights,

strategic arms sales, and the appropriate security role of France and the EU in East Asia. A more accurate understanding of French (and EU) objectives and policies in East Asia necessitates analyzing the multiple facets and inter-relationship of the economic, political and human rights objectives of the East Asian region to French and EU interests. EU policy and French “national” policy are not always distinctive or easily separable as the interconnectedness of both national and EU policy is exerting a Europeanizing effect (both top-down and bottom-up). Aside from trade and aid, the literature on French policies in Asia tends to understate the effect of Europe on French national policies (exc. Nesshöver 99 and Cabestan 97).

What are “European” Interests and Policies in Asia?

For useful analysis, EU interests and policies in Asia are taken to mean objectives and declarations made in the name of Europe by EU institutions. The “EU” will be taken as represented by its key institutions: the Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers, and the European Council. The objectives and declarations made by these institutions will be taken as representative of the EU. Eg. “New Asia Strategy” paper proposed by the Commission and approved by the Council in July 1994, and the 2001 Strategic Framework document

Three Issue-areas

Trade – France following the lead of German pragmatism? (Hilpert 98, Nesshöver 99)

- a) 1991 a watershed year: EC-Asia trade overtook transatlantic trade for the first time. In 1998, Asia accounted for 24.1% of the EU’s external trade: more than the countries of the Mediterranean, Latin America, Africa and the former Soviet Union combined.¹
- b) Commission has been the engine in developing various forms of economic cooperation with ASEAN, China. Member states have entrusted the External Trade Commissioner to conduct economic negotiations at Community level with eg. Japan, China for WTO (2001) to exercise greater bargaining power.

Political and Strategic presence – leveraging on UNSC status, history and military (Stares and Regaud 97)

- a) as permanent members of the Security Council
- b) naval assets based in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean
- c) France (and Britain) occupy seats on Korean Energy Development Organisation (KEDO) with the US, China, Russia and the EU, set up in 1996
- d) regular EU troika summits with China, Japan; biennial ASEM summits with East Asian HoGs since 1996;
- e) Growing defence ties with Taiwan, Singapore; strategic dialogue of defence ministers and senior officials with Japan in 1994, and with China and South Korea from 1996.²

Human Rights - historic heritage as the “cradle of human rights” inapplicable in Asia? “China model” (MAE 1997, Clapham 99)

- a) From mid-1993, the Mitterrand-Dumas approach was abandoned in favour of a more conciliatory stance on human rights that emphasised economic exchange and implicitly acknowledged the validity of Asian arguments that human rights could be culturally relative.

¹ Chris Patten (2000), “Europe and Asia: A closer partnership in the new millennium”, Tokyo.

² “European Defence and Euro-Asia Security Relations,” Speech by Alain Richard, French Minister of Defence, Paris, 19 February 1999.

- b) New post-Cold War agenda based on a commitment to defining acceptable economic and human rights standards as a precondition of privileged contact with the EU? (Forster 99) The European Parliament (EP) has also played an active role and has since 1987 made public, regular criticisms of the human rights in Asia.. In 1996, the EP even awarded Wei Jingsheng - China's most celebrated dissident - the Sakharov prize for Freedom of Thought.

III Has there been policy-convergence Europeanization?

Yes France as agent in EU structure:

- The four main targets of French policy in Asia: China, India, Japan and ASEAN (Godement 95, Dorient 2002), coincide with those of the EU. The EU has clearly defined political-economic interests in ASEAN and India; China and Japan were identified as cornerstones of the EU's 1994 "New Asia Strategy".³
- Since the 1991 Paris Peace Conference, the EU has invested substantial political and economic resources in Vietnam's *doi moi* liberalisation reforms and the reconstruction of Cambodia. These three countries are members of the group of Northeast and Southeast Asian countries often collectively referred to as "East Asia".⁴
- Dialogue between EU and East Asian leaders at fora such as the ASEAN-EU dialogue, the ARF (from 1994) and since 1996 at ASEM (Singapore-French initiative launched in 1994).
- Common positions and actions viz. Tiananmen sanctions, East Timor, Myanmar, nuclear proliferation in Korea and South Asia

No France takes unilateral actions based on narrow national interest:

- Rainbow Warrior
- 1995 Nuclear Testing
- French defection from 1997 CHR (Committee on Human Rights) Council position on China; EU's 'constructive engagement' approach to HR question in China from March 1998 GAC decision
- ARF candidature; privileged relations with Indochinese states in the *Francophonie*

Yes but...convergent or less unilateral French foreign policy:

- "would have happened with or without the EU"
- uneasy intra-EU truce on human rights. European Parliament activist, UK, Nordic states on China, Myanmar/Burma
- Still competitive/conflicting member states' commercial interests

Conclusion

French resources may be adequate for national policies towards individual countries but are inadequate for a coherent global policy towards East Asia. Increasingly, French capacities are too limited to meet national objectives in large and powerful countries such as China.

³ The EU's first comprehensive strategy papers on China and Japan were unveiled in July 1995.

⁴ COM (94)427 defined "Asia" as three regions comprising: the 8 countries and economies of East Asia (China, Japan, the Koreas, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao and Mongolia), the 10 countries of Southeast Asia (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Burma, all members of ASEAN since 1998), and the 8 countries of South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives and Afghanistan). A fourth region, Australasia (centred on Australia, New Zealand) was grouped under "Asia" by the EU in its COM (2001) 469 final, 4 September 2001.

Under which conditions is there convergence of French and EU objectives?

Strategic self-interest

- a) Common interests against superior rival, eg. US/Japan

Top-down (and lateral) convergence

- b) Socialisation of European élites
c) Policy transfer and learning; political opportunity and role of policy entrepreneurs, eg an activist Commission

Bottom-up

- d) Strong domestic lobby- media, industry, 'western values' public opinion
e) Member state capacity in exporting/enlarging national preference to EU policy; EU as 'cover'

External sources

- f) Expectation/request of target states for coordinated EU policies; cf. Barcelona process, Lomé?

National and collective EU foreign policies in East Asia are intimately related in a dialectical process of continuous, iterative adjustment and cannot be neatly dissociated. An understanding of the top-down and bottom-up dimensions of Europeanization is thus necessary to make sense of the evolution in French policy in East Asia since foreign policy cooperation between the member states was further institutionalised after the Cold War in the Maastricht Treaty

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