

EUROPEAN FOREIGN
AFFAIRS REVIEW

Published by:
Kluwer Law International B.V.
P.O. Box 316
2400 AH Alphen aan den Rijn
The Netherlands

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Wolters Kluwer Legal & Regulatory U.S.
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Frederick, MD 21704
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In all other countries sold and distributed by:
Turpin Distribution Services
Stratton Business Park
Pegasus Drive
Biggleswade
Bedfordshire SG18 8TQ
United Kingdom

ISSN 1384-6299

©2016 Kluwer Law International BV

Print subscription prices, including postage (2016): EUR 485/USD 647/GBP 356.
Online subscription prices (2016): EUR 449/USD 600/GBP 330.

(2016) 20 EFA Rev. should be used to cite this volume.

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Partnering for Global Security: The EU, Its Strategic Partners and Transnational Security Challenges

Thomas RENARD^{*}

This article reviews the scope and depth of the European Union's cooperation on security issues with key global powers, i.e., its so-called 'strategic partners'. It starts from the assumption that the EU pursues its ambition to become a global security actor as stated in its strategic documents and that, to do so, it must develop partnerships with other countries. The three key questions that this article addresses are the following: How do these security partnerships unfold? Do they deliver? And do they matter at all? The article starts with a quick overview of the key security challenges identified by the EU, before exploring the Union's attempt to become a (global) security actor, which is the pre-requisite to enter international partnerships. The main part of the article then looks specifically and in detail at the EU's ten strategic partnerships across four security issues: non-proliferation, terrorism, organized crime and cyber-security. A final section assesses the value of these security partnerships.

1 INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) is confronted with a number of security challenges, which are not only growing in number but also in complexity. Most of these challenges are not particularly new, but they have evolved and adapted to a new international environment. The transnational nature of these challenges is now more pronounced than before, as a result of global connectivity and interdependence. Such key security challenges include nuclear proliferation, international terrorism, organized crime and cyber-security.

To address these challenges, a certain degree of international cooperation is needed, at the bilateral and multilateral levels. Although sometimes described as an 'island of peace and stability', the EU is directly affected by these challenges. As a result, it must develop policy responses and participate to global cooperation efforts. The Union must engage with the main global powers that are shaping the policy agenda on these issues in order to ensure its own security, but also to meet its ambition to become a global security actor. Arguably, it can do so in the context

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of its so-called ‘strategic partnerships’ – a political framework guiding its relations with ten major partners, including notably the United States (US) and China.¹

Without pre-empting our conclusions, two simple observations suggest that the EU’s strategic partnerships are likely to be under-delivering in the security area. First, the EU is a nascent and fledgling security actor. Second, these strategic partnerships have often been criticized for being mostly rhetorical devices and for not delivering results.² Yet, it is remarkable that the academic and policy literatures have almost completely ignored these security partnerships so far, perhaps unsurprisingly given the scarce literature on strategic partnerships, on the one hand, and on the EU as a security actor, on the other hand. This contribution aims therefore at filling this gap, by combining these two distinct literatures but also – and perhaps mostly – by relying on a careful analysis of EU policy discourses and outcomes with regard to its security partnerships.³ Three key questions drive our research: How do these security partnerships unfold? Do they deliver? Do they matter at all?

This article seeks less to develop a theoretical framework for interpreting these partnerships than to expose some basic empirical evidence that can lay the ground for future in-depth research on this topic. It is highly exploratory in this regard. It starts with a quick overview of the key security challenges identified by the EU, before exploring the Union’s attempt to become a (global) security actor, which is the pre-requisite to enter international partnerships. The main part of the article then looks specifically and in detail at the EU’s ten strategic partnerships in security issues. A final section assesses the value of these security partnerships.

2 SECURITY CHALLENGES TO THE EU

In order to study the EU’s security partnerships, we first need to understand how the EU perceives its security environment. Indeed, it is this perception that will drive the Union’s global efforts. The 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS),

¹ The ten strategic partners of the EU are: Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea and the US.

² For a review, see for instance A. Schmidt, *Strategic Partnerships. – a contested policy concept* (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP Working Paper 7, 2010)

³ Given the limited amount of existing material, this article builds on an extensive mapping exercise focusing on the EU’s cooperation with its ten partners in the face of the four security challenges studied here. This series of four papers, based on interviews, data gathering and literature review was published in 2013–2014 by the European Strategic Partnerships Observatory (ESPO): T. Renard, *Partnering for a nuclear-safe world: the EU, its strategic partners and nuclear non-proliferation* (FRIDE and Egmont Institute, ESPO Working Paper 3, 2013); T. Renard, *Confidential partnerships? The EU, its strategic partners and international terrorism* (FRIDE and Egmont Institute, ESPO Working Paper 4, 2014); T. Renard, *Partners in crime? The EU, its strategic partners and international organised crime* (FRIDE and Egmont Institute, ESPO Working Paper 5, 2014); T. Renard, *The rise of cyber-diplomacy: the EU, its strategic partners and cyber-security*, (FRIDE and Egmont Institute, ESPO Working Paper 7, 2014).

which is often seen as a guidebook for European global action, identifies a series of ‘external’ security challenges.⁴ First on the list comes terrorism, which ‘puts lives at risk; it imposes large costs; it seeks to undermine the openness and tolerance of our societies, and it poses a growing strategic threat to the whole of Europe.’ Second on the list comes the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), which ‘is potentially the greatest threat to our security.’ The other threats mentioned in the ESS are (in order of appearance): regional conflicts, state failure, and organized crime. In the 2008 Implementation Report of the ESS, cyber-security was added to the list as a new source of concern and priority, together with energy security and climate change.⁵

In the 2010 Internal Security Strategy (ISS), which was designed as the internal counterpart to the ESS, the EU identifies a series of internal security challenges.⁶ These challenges are not completely disconnected from the external ones, given that ‘internal security cannot be achieved in isolation from the rest of the world, and it is therefore important to ensure coherence and complementarity between the internal and external aspects of EU security.’ Hence, a certain redundancy appears between the challenges identified in both the ESS and ISS.⁷ Indeed, the ISS lists the following threats (in order of appearance): terrorism in any form, serious and organized crime, cyber-crime, cross-border crime, violence itself, natural and man-made disasters, and other items such as road traffic accidents.

Table 1 Comparing the European (External) Security Strategy with the Internal Security Strategy

<i>Threats Listed by the ESS</i>	<i>Threats Listed by the ISS</i>
Terrorism	Terrorism
Proliferation of WMD	
Regional conflicts	
State failure	
Organized crime	Organized crime
Cyber-security	Cyber-crime

⁴ European Council, *A secure Europe in a better world. European security strategy* (Brussels, 2003).

⁵ European Council, *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy - Providing Security in a Changing World* (Brussels, 2008).

⁶ European Council, *Internal security strategy for the European Union: Towards a European security model* (Brussels, 2010).

⁷ G. Lindstrom, *Internal and external security strategies*, in *Handbook for Decision Makers – The Common Security and Defence Policy of the European Union* (J. Rehr ed., Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports of the Republic of Austria, 2014).

<i>Threats Listed by the ESS</i>	<i>Threats Listed by the ISS</i>
Energy security	
Climate change	Natural and man-made disasters
	Border security

All these challenges remain relevant today – some of them perhaps even more than before. Comparing the internal and external security strategies, some challenges stand out as priority areas for the EU, either due to a high level of threat and urgency, or alternatively due to their ubiquity in both the internal and external security dimensions. These challenges are: non-proliferation, terrorism, organized crime and cyber-security.

Nuclear proliferation is a twofold challenge for Europe. On the one hand, Europe fears that a country could destabilize regional or international security through the development of nuclear capabilities, particularly in Europe's neighbourhood. On the other hand, the use of nuclear material by a terrorist group is considered to be 'the most frightening scenario', according to the ESS. Terrorism itself is a major security challenge in Europe, particularly since a number of terrorist groups are active on European soil. The appeal of international terrorism groups to a small but significant number of European citizens raises major security concerns; whether they get radicalized online and become active in Europe, or whether they decide to join the frontline in Syria or elsewhere and to return later. Organized crime is a third major security concern in Europe, with more than 3,600 criminal organizations active in the Union.⁸ Criminal activities have huge social and financial implications, and they can destabilize entire countries or regions. There are also links between drug trafficking and the financing of terrorism in some parts of the world, notably in the neighbouring Sahel region. Finally, cyber-security is perhaps the newest of these four security challenges, but certainly not the least. Cyber-crime is now thriving, representing a non-negligible cost to the global economy, estimated by some studies at several hundred billion US dollars annually.⁹ Cyber-attacks, carried out by states or 'hacktivists', and cyber-espionage are also on the rise globally, threatening a free and secure internet for all.

Over the past few years, these four challenges have been identified in EU documents as the priority areas of action for the EU's global security policies. One could argue that the Ukrainian conflict and the rising threat from Russia, among

⁸ Europol, *EU serious and organised crime threat assessment 2013* (Europol, 2013).

⁹ N. Robinson et. al., *Feasibility Study for a European Cybercrime Centre*, Technical Report (RAND Corporation, 2012); Symantec, *Norton study calculates cost of global cybercrime: \$114 billion annually*, Press Release (7 Sep. 2011).

others, has slightly affected this sense of priority, with a need to refocus on more traditional defence. However, a full paradigm shift away from transnational challenges is unlikely, as confirmed during recent discussions about the ‘strategic review’ – the debate on a new EU security strategy, expected for 2016. Therefore, our assessment is exclusively based on the EU’s performance on the four above-mentioned transnational threats.

3 THE EU AS A GLOBAL SECURITY ACTOR

The quest for international security partnerships pre-supposes that the EU has become – or is becoming – a global security actor, as some scholars have suggested.¹⁰ The 2003 ESS recognized that the EU is a global player which ‘should be ready to share in the responsibility for global security’. Following this precept, the EU has become more active in confronting the key challenges of our times, including nuclear proliferation, terrorism, organized crime and cyber-threats. To begin with, strategies have been drafted to identify objectives and priorities for the European action. The WMD strategy was adopted in 2003, in the aftermath of the war in Iraq.¹¹ The counter-terrorism strategy was adopted in 2005, following two dramatic bombings in Madrid and London.¹² These two strategies indicated a step-up in the EU’s involvement in these security areas, despite their limitations pointed out by critics, which can be partly explained by their reactive timing and hasty drafting.¹³ The cyber-strategy was adopted more recently, in 2013, as this challenge is becoming increasingly prominent, with a growing number of reported incidents affecting the European economy, its governments and its citizens.¹⁴ With regard to organized crime, a number of specific strategies have been adopted on drug trafficking, human trafficking or IPR infringements. Yet, there is still no integrated strategy covering the whole spectrum of criminal activities, which can be seen as a lack of vision and a shortcoming for the EU’s actions in this field. These strategies signal the European intention to raise its profile in the security realm, internally and externally.

The EU has also crafted the policy instruments to develop its international security profile. Twenty years ago, the EU launched its Common Foreign and

¹⁰ See for instance, C. Kaunert & K. Zwolski, *The EU as a global security actor: A comprehensive analysis beyond CFSP and JHA* (Palgrave, 2013).

¹¹ European Council, *EU strategy against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction* (Brussels, December 2003).

¹² European Council, *The European Union counter-terrorism strategy* (Brussels, November 2005).

¹³ D. Keohane, *The absent friend: EU foreign policy and counter-terrorism*, 46 (1) J. Com. Mkt. Stud. 125–146 (2008); C. Katsioulis & C. Mölling, *NPT review 2010: What role for the EU?*, International Policy Analysis (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2010).

¹⁴ European Commission and High Representative, *Cybersecurity strategy of the European Union: An open, safe and secure cyberspace*, JOIN(2013)1 (Brussels, February 2013).

Security Policy (CFSP) and, ten years later, its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which have both allowed to increase the EU's international role.¹⁵ The EU's mediating role over nuclear negotiations with Iran is perhaps the most visible European effort in the field of international security, but it is certainly not the only one. The international dimension of internal EU security policies should not be neglected either. According to Monar, the external dimension of justice and home affairs is one of the fastest-expanding policy areas.¹⁶ Formerly inward-looking institutions and agencies, such as DG home or Europol for instance, are increasingly engaged in dialogues with third countries.¹⁷ Overall, although remaining a fledgling actor, the EU is starting to appear as an interlocutor in addressing security challenges across policy and geographic areas.¹⁸

According to the ESS, the EU should cope with security challenges mainly through two channels: multilateralism and strategic bilateralism. On the one hand, it should seek to strengthen 'well-functioning international institutions and a rule-based international order' and to work through multilateral cooperation. This pursuit of multilateralism as means and objective is known as the doctrine of 'effective multilateralism'.¹⁹ On the other hand, the EU should develop 'partnerships with key actors' since 'there are few if any problems we can deal with on our own', observes the ESS. The EU's global approach can be called 'multi-dimensional' in the sense that it is simultaneously active at the bilateral, regional and multilateral levels, while seeking synergies between these various levels. Whereas the compatibility between these various approaches has still to be explored in the academic literature, the EU has articulated them through the notion of 'partnerships for effective multilateralism', although the concrete arrangements and implications of this notion have never been explicated.²⁰

Traditionally, the EU's foreign and security policies relied heavily on multilateral cooperation. For instance, the EU has become an active player in the UN system, and it regularly favours multilateral approaches to conflict resolution. It also promotes the adoption and implementation of multilateral conventions,

¹⁵ Kaunert & Zwolski, *supra* n. 10; A. Menon, *The JCMS Annual Review Lecture Divided and declining? Europe in a changing world*, 52 J. Com. Mkt. Stud. 5–24 (2014).

¹⁶ J. Monar, *The EU's externalisation of internal security objectives: perspectives after Lisbon and Stockholm*, 45 (2) Intl. Spectator, 23–39 (2010); J. Monar, *The external dimension of the EU's area of freedom, security and justice: Progress, potential and limitations after the Treaty of Lisbon*, Report 1 (Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2012).

¹⁷ See for instance the annual reports produced by Europol and Eurojust, available online and publicly on their respective websites.

¹⁸ Renard, *supra* n. 3; Renard, *supra* n. 3; Renard, *supra* n. 3; Renard, *supra* n. 3.

¹⁹ E. Driessens & L. Van Schaik (eds), *The EU and effective multilateralism: Internal and external reform practices* (Routledge, 2014).

²⁰ European Council, *supra* n. 5; G. Grevi & A. de Vasconcelos (eds), *Partnerships for effective multilateralism: EU relations with Brazil, China, India and Russia*, Chaillot Paper 109 (EU Institute for Security Studies, 2008).

such as the UN Global Counter-terrorism Strategy or UN resolution 1373 on counter-terrorism, UN resolution 1540 on nuclear non-proliferation, or the Council of Europe Budapest Convention on cyber-crime. In addition, the EU is also one of the main financial contributors to international security agencies, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) or the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Beyond multilateralism, the EU has been increasingly active at the bilateral level over the past few years, notably through its so-called 'strategic partnerships'. This growing emphasis on the bilateral approach is visible in the various security strategies mentioned above, which all recommend closer cooperation with strategic partners, although not always specifying which ones. The US is the only partner singled out in all documents, whereas other partners are also occasionally identified. For instance, the non-proliferation strategy argues that cooperation could be deepened with other partners 'such as the Russian Federation, Japan and Canada'.²¹

This reading of EU documents suggests two things. First, the EU is progressively rebalancing its foreign and security approaches between multilateralism and bilateralism.²² Whereas multilateralism was the EU's first choice traditionally, it is now complemented with a more strategic bilateral approach. Second, strategic partnerships have been increasingly integrated in the EU's discourse on security, indicating their growing importance in the eyes of EU policy-makers. For instance, the 2010 ISS recommended working with partners 'to address the root causes of the internal security problems faced by the EU',²³ whereas the European Commission asserted that security issues 'should be integrated in relevant strategic partnerships'.²⁴ A similar recommendation had already been made in the 2005 Strategy for the External dimension of Justice and Home Affairs, and it was reiterated in the 2010 Stockholm Programme, which is the EU's action plan with regard to the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice.²⁵

Yet, two main shortcomings run through these documents. On the one hand, the 'key partners' are mostly unspecified, except for the US. This underscores the perceived importance of the transatlantic partnership, but also the lack of vision with regard to other potential partners. On the other hand, it is not entirely clear

²¹ European Council, *supra* n. 11.

²² T. Renard, *Partnerships for effective multilateralism? Assessing the compatibility between EU bilateralism, (inter-)regionalism and multilateralism*, Cambridge Rev. Intl. Aff. (forthcoming, online 10 July 2015).

²³ European Council, *supra* n. 6.

²⁴ European Commission, *The EU Internal Security Strategy in Action: Five steps towards a more secure Europe*, COM(2010) 673 final (2010).

²⁵ European Council, *The Stockholm programme. An open and secure Europe serving and protecting citizens* (2010); Council of the EU, *A strategy for the external dimension of JHA: Global freedom, security and justice* (2005).

what the EU should do with these partners. Indeed, no clear objectives for these partnerships have been identified. The orientation, scope and breadth of the EU's strategic partnerships in security issues is thus left mostly to the interpretation of relevant actors and, to a certain degree, to improvisation. That is hardly the sign of strategic design.

4 PARTNERING FOR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY?²⁶

As the EU aims to become a global security actor, it is inevitably and increasingly exposed to other international players, whether in a spirit of cooperation or confrontation. Among all these possible interlocutors, our assumption is that the EU is increasingly, and perhaps primarily seeking to cooperate with its strategic partners, because they have been identified as pivotal players overall, including in the security area. Such security partnerships would be traceable through a specific rhetoric and joint actions, but also through specific institutional mechanisms. The following sections test this assumption in order to lead to a general assessment of the EU's strategic partnerships in security.

4.1 PARTNERSHIPS IN WORDS AND DEEDS

At the declaratory level, the EU shares a certain convergence with its strategic partners when it comes to identifying security challenges. The importance of these transnational challenges and the necessity to cooperate is underscored in joint documents with all partners, for instance in the so-called 'joint action plans',²⁷ which identify common priorities for the partnerships. There is of course a difference of emphasis across partnerships, reflecting different scope and ambition. For instance, the 2005 EU-Russia Road Map for the Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice identified more than fifty action points to combat organized crime, whereas the 2010 EU-South Korea Framework Agreement simply reaffirmed that a dialogue on this issue 'would be beneficial'. In some cases, the broad political agreements underpinning each strategic partnership are complemented with joint declarations on a specific issue. Table 2 compiles the relevant joint declarations between the EU and its partners. Some of these declarations, such as the 2004 EU-Japan Joint Declaration on Disarmament and

²⁶ This section draws extensively from the findings of the four working papers published by the European Strategic Partnerships Observatory (see *supra* n. 3).

²⁷ The EU has adopted joint action plans with Brazil, India, Mexico, and South Africa. There was an earlier 'Action Plan' with Japan, whereas priorities in the relations with the US and Canada appear in 'partnership agendas'. With Russia, the scope of cooperation is determined by the four 'Roadmaps', and with South Korea by the 'Framework Agreement'.

Non-Proliferation, highlight an existing partnership and pinpoint areas for further cooperation. Other declarations instead, such as the 2010 EU-India Joint Declaration on International Terrorism, are a political impetus aiming to jolt cooperation where it is limited or barely existent.

Overall, these additional joint statements fulfil mostly a political – or signalling – function. To some extent, however, they reflect a sense of priority or orientation for each partnership. As Table 2 shows, some partnerships – particularly the transatlantic one – have put more declaratory emphasis on security issues than others, whereas the type of security issue emphasized can vary across partnerships. For instance, the EU and China have highlighted non-proliferation in a joint statement, whereas the EU and India have put forward counter-terrorism cooperation. Yet, as such, these statements say little about the actual output of security partnerships.

Table 2 Key Joint Statements on Security Issues between the EU and Strategic Partners

<i>Partnership</i>	<i>Relevant Policy Area</i>	<i>Relevant Statement(S)</i>
EU-USA	OC/CS	EU-US Joint Statement on ‘Enhancing transatlantic cooperation in the area of Justice, Freedom and Security’ (2009)
	NP	EU-US Declaration on the Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (2004)
		EU-US Joint Programme of Work on the Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (2005)
		EU-US Declaration on Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (2009)
	NP/CT	EU-US Declaration on Enhancing Cooperation in the Field of Non-Proliferation and the Fight Against Terrorism (2005)
	CT	EU-US Declaration on Combating Terrorism (2004)
		Toledo Joint Statement (2010)
		EU-US and Member States Declaration on Counterterrorism (2010)

<i>Partnership</i>	<i>Relevant Policy Area</i>	<i>Relevant Statement(S)</i>
EU-Canada	NP	EU-Canada Joint Summit Declaration (2005)
	CT	EU-Canada Joint Summit Statement (2002)
EU-Mexico		
EU-Brazil		
EU-South Africa		
EU-India	CT/CS	EU-India Joint Declaration on International Terrorism (2010)
EU-China	NP	Joint Declaration of the People's Republic of China and the European Union on Non-proliferation and Arms Control (2004)
EU-Japan	NP	Japan-EU Joint Declaration on Disarmament and Non-proliferation (2004)
		20th EU-Japan Summit Joint Press Statement (2011)
	CS	EU-Japan Joint Statement on Cooperation on Information and Communication Technology (2004)
	CT	EU-Japan Joint Declaration on Terrorism (2001)
EU-South Korea		
EU-Russia	CT	EU-Russia Joint Statement on the Fight against Terrorism (2002)
<i>NP = non-proliferation; CT = counter-terrorism; OC = organized crime; CS = cyber-security. The grey area indicates the absence of security-related joint statements.</i>		

Rhetoric aside, the EU's cooperation with its partners varies extensively. Table 3 offers a quick overview of the EU's security cooperation with its partners, from which differences and similarities in scope and breadth of this cooperation stand out. In the field of nuclear non-proliferation, the EU has cooperated closely with Russia to ensure nuclear safety, notably through its Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation (INSC). It has also developed joint initiatives in Russia, together with the US and Japan, in order to employ former Soviet scientists or to manage surplus weapon-grade plutonium. Smaller multi-million projects were also carried out with Mexico, Brazil and China under the INSC. At the diplomatic level,

negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme constitute the most visible instance of cooperation between the EU and its partners. The EU is part of the mediation group, along with the permanent members of the UNSC. In this dossier, despite some divergences, the EU and the US coordinate their position closely, whereas regular trilateral meetings take place with Canada, hence reinforcing the transatlantic partnership. Russia and China, on the other hand, are considered to be (challenging) interlocutors more than partners.

In counter-terrorism, strategic partnerships can facilitate the exchange of information and best practices. The EU and the US are particularly engaged at that level. A number of joint training and seminars have been organized, for instance on radicalization or on explosives. A web of agreements on institutional exchanges and liaison officers underpin the partnership. According to the EU counter-terrorism coordinator, Gilles de Kerchove, there is 'no significant counter-terrorism investigation in Europe in which US support has not played a crucial role'.²⁸ Some legal agreements have been signed with partners to deepen cooperation in this area. These include the extradition and mutual legal assistance (MLA) agreements, signed with the US and Japan, as well as the agreements on passenger name record (PNR) data, signed with the US and Canada, or the EU-US terrorist finance tracking programme (TFTP), also known as the SWIFT agreement. Similar agreements have been envisaged with other partners, notably a MLA with India and Russia, or a PNR with South Africa and South Korea. But negotiations have not started yet, notably due to a lack of trust and political will. Finally, some cooperation has been reported in terms of capacity-building in third countries. In Afghanistan, for instance, Canada participated to the EU police mission (EUPOL), whereas the EU and Japan set up jointly a police training centre. In Africa, the EU Sahel strategy called for more cooperation with the US, Japan and Canada. Cooperation and coordination has taken place with these countries, but only to a limited extent.

With regard to organized crime, the transatlantic partnership is deep-rooted and very operational, with numerous instances of cooperation on dismantling euro-counterfeiting shops, as well as countering drug trafficking or cigarettes smuggling networks. Contacts are established between numerous agencies on both sides of the Atlantic, facilitating cooperation. Cooperation against drug trafficking has also taken place with Mexico and Brazil, although that cooperation is more recent and more limited. For instance, the EU-Brazil political dialogue on drugs was only established in 2013. Russia and the EU have an ambitious agenda with regard to organized crime, and many contacts exist between respective agencies. Yet, the partnership remains under-delivering, even more so in the aftermath of

²⁸ G. De Kerchove, *EU Action Plan on Combating Terrorism* (Brussels, January 2011).

the Ukrainian crisis. Conversely, despite a less formalized architecture, the EU-Japan partnership is considered to be useful. Cooperation with other partners is very limited, if existent at all. Legal agreements such as the MLA or PNR are useful to combating organized crime, but they only apply to the partnerships with the US, Canada and Japan. Finally, some cooperation has taken place in third regions. For instance, regular contacts on criminal matters occur in West Africa between liaison officers from Europe, Canada and the US. In Central America, the EU and Mexico have pledged to deepen their cooperation, but that remains limited at this stage.

When it comes to cyber-security, the transatlantic partnership is again the most developed of all partnerships by far. The EU and the US have established an operational cooperation, notably resulting in the conduct of a joint cyber-security exercise in November 2011 – the first ever with a non-European partner, involving more than 100 government experts – while another similar exercise took place in 2014. The EU-US partnership is perhaps the only one sufficiently advanced to consider triangulated efforts for cyber capacity-building in third countries. Some cooperation has also taken place with Japan, Canada or Brazil, notably on cyber-crime, critical information infrastructure protection (CIIP) and internet security. Russia and China, on the other hand, appear to be more difficult partners since they are perceived as a major source of cyber-insecurity. As a result, cooperation has mostly focussed on confidence-building mechanisms. Finally, legal (e.g., MLA) and operational (e.g., Europol, Eurojust) agreements are also relevant to international partnering in cyber-security.

*Table 3 Key Elements of Security Cooperation between the EU and Its Partners*²⁹

	<i>Nuclear Non-proliferation</i>	<i>International Terrorism</i>	<i>Organized Crime</i>	<i>Cyber-Security</i>
Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN 1540 resolution) – Multilateral cooperation (G8, PSI) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exchange of information (CIP) – Joint seminars/training (Europol) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exchange of information (Sahel) – Operational cooperation (OLAF, Frontex) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exchange of information – Operational cooperation (Europol) – Coordination on internet governance

²⁹ Renard, *supra* n. 3.

	<i>Nuclear Non-proliferation</i>	<i>International Terrorism</i>	<i>Organized Crime</i>	<i>Cyber-Security</i>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Capacity-building (Afghanistan, Sahel) – Capacity-building (Afghanistan, Sahel) – Legal agreements (PNR) – Multilateral cooperation (G8, GCTF) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN CT Strategy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Capacity-building (CSDP) – Data agreements (PNR) – Data agreements (PNR) – Multilateral cooperation (G8, MAOC) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UNCTOC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Multilateral cooperation (Global Alliance, G8)
USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Capacity-building (Russia) – Mediation (Iran) – Multilateral cooperation (G8, PSI) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN 1540 resolution, NPT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exchange of information (liaison officers, CIP, Sahel) – Joint trainings/ seminars (explosives, radicalization, recruitment) – Data agreements (PNR, TFTP) – Legal agreements (MLA, extradition) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exchange of information (Sahel, Threat Notice, liaison officers) – Operational cooperation (OLAF, Frontex) – Joint trainings – Capacity-building (CSDP) – data exchanges (PNR) – Legal agreements (MLA, extradition) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exchange of information – Operational cooperation (Europol) – Joint trainings/ exercises – Science & Innovation – Capacity-building (cyber-exercises, triangulation) – Legal agreements (MLA) – Coordination on internet governance

	<i>Nuclear Non-proliferation</i>	<i>International Terrorism</i>	<i>Organized Crime</i>	<i>Cyber-Security</i>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Operational agreements (aviation security agreement, container security initiative) – Multilateral cooperation (G8, GCTF, ICAO) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN CT Strategy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Multilateral cooperation (G8, MAOC, Dublin Group) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UNCTOC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Coordination on internet governance – Multilateral cooperation (Global Alliance, Budapest Convention, G8)
Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Capacity-building (INSC) – Multilateral cooperation (G8) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN 1540 resolution, NPT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Multilateral cooperation (FATF) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN CT Strategy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exchange of information (Threat notice, cocaine) – Joint training (Europol) – Inter-regional cooperation (EU-LAC, EU-CAN) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UNCTOC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Multilateral cooperation (Global Alliance)
Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Capacity-building (INSC) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN 1540 resolution) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN CT Strategy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exchange of information (Threat Notice, prosecutors network) – Capacity-building (AIRCOP, SEACOP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Joint funding (cyber research) – Coordination on internet-governance

	<i>Nuclear Non-proliferation</i>	<i>International Terrorism</i>	<i>Organized Crime</i>	<i>Cyber-Security</i>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Inter-regional cooperation (EU-LAC, EU-CAN) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UNCTOC) 	
South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Legal agreements (WMD clause) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN 1540 resolution) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN CT Strategy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Promoting effective multilateralism (UNCTOC) 	
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN 1540 resolution) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Basic exchanges of information (CTC, Europol) – Exploratory seminars (Europol, Eurojust) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN CT Strategy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exploratory seminars (Europol, Eurojust) – Capacity-building (EU funding) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UNCTOC) 	
China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Capacity-building (INSC) – Mediation (Iran) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN 1540 resolution) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Multilateral cooperation (ASEM) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN CT Strategy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exchange of information – Exploratory workshops – Operational cooperation (OLAF) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UNCTOC, FATF) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Capacity-building (data protection laws) – Confidence-building mechanisms

	<i>Nuclear Non-proliferation</i>	<i>International Terrorism</i>	<i>Organized Crime</i>	<i>Cyber-Security</i>
Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Capacity-building (Russia) – Multilateral cooperation (G8, PSI) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN 1540 resolution) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exchange of information (Europol) – Capacity-building (Afghanistan, Sahel, Southeast Asia) – Legal agreements (MLA) – Multilateral cooperation (FATF, G8, Dublin Group, ARF) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN CT Strategy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Joint workshops (Tajikistan) – Operational cooperation (Europol, JIT) – Legal agreements (MLA) – Multilateral cooperation (G8, Dublin Group) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UNCTOC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exchange of information (EC3, CIIP, smartphone security) – Joint seminars (Internet Security Forum) – Joint funding (internet security) – Legal agreements (MLA) – Coordination on internet governance – Multilateral cooperation (Global Alliance, Budapest Convention, G8)
South Korea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN 1540 resolution) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Multilateral cooperation (ARE, FATF) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN CT Strategy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Legal agreements (WMD clause) – Multilateral cooperation (G8, PSI) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UNCTOC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Multilateral cooperation (Global Alliance)

	<i>Nuclear Non-proliferation</i>	<i>International Terrorism</i>	<i>Organized Crime</i>	<i>Cyber-Security</i>
Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mediation (Iran)– Multilateral cooperation (G8, PSI) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN 1540 resolution) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exchange of information (Europol, JHA counsellors, CTC) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UN CT Strategy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exchange of information (Europol, liaison officers, EMCDDA) – Operational cooperation (Frontex, OLAF) – Capacity-building (TACIS/ENPI, CSDP) – Joint trainings (Europol) – Promoting effective multilateralism (UNCTOC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Basic exchange of information (Europol, EC3) – Confidence-building mechanisms (joint seminars, OSCE)

4.2 THE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL APPROACH

Bilateral cooperation constitutes indisputably the thrust of any strategic partnership. Yet, cooperation with partners can also occur at the inter-regional or multilateral levels. There are many instances of such cooperation in the security area, beyond interactions within the UN system. In non-proliferation, the EU has worked jointly with other G8 members, as well as Mexico and South Korea, in the framework of the G8 Global Partnership against the spread of WMDs. Discussions have also taken place with EU partners within the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) or the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), as well as with the African Union. In counter-terrorism, the EU has worked in the framework of the G8 Counter-terrorism Action Group (CTAG), or the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) concerning terror financing. The EU has also joined the US-led Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), in which it is active in various working groups in coordination with some partners. A productive instance of cooperation at the multilateral level was the EU-US initiative leading to the adoption of an International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) declaration on aviation security, adopted by 190 countries in 2010. In the fight against organized crime,

cooperation occurs also within minilateral forums, such as the G8, the FATF, and other specialized bodies. EU cooperation on criminal issues with Brazil and Mexico is complemented with the inter-regional partnership between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean (EU-LAC), which has specific coordination mechanisms on drugs, namely the EU-LAC Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism on Drugs (since 1999) and the EU-CAN High Level Specialized Dialogue in Drugs (since 1995). In cyber-security, the Council of Europe's Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, which has been signed by the US, Japan, Canada and South Africa, facilitates operational cooperation and sets guidelines for developing and harmonizing the heterogeneous national legal frameworks. The EU and the US have also launched the Global Alliance against Child Sexual Abuse Online in 2012, which now counts fifty-three countries including Canada, Japan, Mexico and South Korea. Other relevant multilateral bodies include the UNODC expert group on cyber-crime, the G8 sub-group on high-tech crime, the OECD, OSCE or NATO, among others.

From the EU's point of view, multilateralism is not just a means to facilitate interactions with partners. It is also an objective in itself, which corresponds to the doctrine of 'effective multilateralism'. This is the reason why the EU has been a staunch promoter of the implementation of global UN resolutions on non-proliferation (UNSC resolution 1540), counter-terrorism (UN CT Strategy and UNSC resolution 1373), organized crime (the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, UNCTOC), as well as the development of international regimes such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), or a new governance model for the internet. Strategic partnerships are then seen as instrumental to foster effective multilateralism. In this regard, it is particularly problematic when a strategic partner does not abide by these multilateral norms. For instance, India was late to join the UNCTOC and Russia continues to oppose the establishment of an implementation review mechanism for it. The fact that India has not joined the NPT or that Russia refuses to sign the Budapest Convention – although being a member of the Council of Europe – is equally unsettling.

An often overlooked dimension of the EU's multi-dimensional approach comes from the fact that EU strategic partnerships can overlap with national ones, including in the security dimension. For instance, China has strategic partnerships with ten EU Member States, Brazil with seven, and India with three. As a result, specific dialogues can overlap. For example, some EU dialogues on cyber-security or counter-terrorism with its partners are complemented by similar dialogues between some (big) Member States and the same partners. The transatlantic partnership is a unique case, in the sense that some dialogues, for instance on non-proliferation or cyber-security, involve all the Member States alongside the

EU, in a unique ‘28+1+1’ model. One can see a risk of conflict and confusion in these overlaps. But one can also see an opportunity for further synergies, as the EU can develop the broader political and normative framework for cooperation, whereas Member States can take over operational aspects. Such division of labour hold great potential for strengthening EU strategic partnerships.

4.3 THE ARCHITECTURE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Strategic partnerships are underpinned by a sophisticated architecture of policy dialogues, designed to facilitate cooperation.³⁰ In the context of these dialogues, officials from both sides meet on a regular basis to discuss specific aspects of an issue. Meetings can take place at various levels: summits, ministerial meetings, senior officials meetings (e.g., at the level of Director General) or expert/technical dialogues. These policy dialogues cover a broad range of issues, related to security and foreign policy (so-called political dialogues, led by the European External Action Service, EEAS) as well as to community issues (so-called sectoral dialogues, led by the European Commission). It is difficult to objectively assess the effectiveness of these dialogues, not least because most of them occur below the radar screen and produce no public result, which explains the lack of information on them. Yet, these dialogues matter a great deal because they create the framework and dynamic from which actual cooperation can eventually emerge. In short, they form the skeleton of any strategic partnership.

The institutional architecture of the ten partnerships varies significantly, as shown in Table 4. The EU has established structured dialogues on security issues with all its partners, but the level of institutionalization clearly differs from one partner to another. There are twenty-four policy dialogues covering terrorism, organized crime, cyber-security and non-proliferation with the US, whereas there are only three security dialogues with South Africa and South Korea, hence not covering all security challenges. Looking across issues, cooperation on terrorism is the least institutionalized of all four issues, with a total of sixteen policy dialogues, but also four partnerships that do not cover this issue at all structurally (Brazil, China, South Africa and South Korea).

Having said this, the level of institutionalization hides different realities. Dialogues can be more or less ambitious and operational, whereas encounters between parties can be more or less flexible. This suggests a useful distinction between *results-oriented dialogues*, focussing on specific deliverables with regard to

³⁰ For a list of all dialogues between the EU and its partners, see the website of the European Strategic Partnerships Observatory (ESPO), a joint project of FRIDE and the Egmont Institute – two think tanks, at: <www.strategicpartnerships.eu>.

an issue, and *process-oriented* ones, focussing instead on the socializing process of meeting. Results-oriented dialogues tend to appear more concrete and successful to observers, but process-oriented ones can also play an important role, not least because such dialogues allow to build trust between recent partners or keep the channels of communication open between them when divergences or tensions arise. The legitimacy and effectiveness of each dialogue can only be evaluated in function of these distinct objectives, otherwise it will draw flawed conclusions.

Most transatlantic security dialogues with the US and Canada fall within the category of results-oriented dialogues. These dialogues are characterized by clear objectives and concrete outcomes, as well as certain flexibility in the pace of encounters, in order to match real needs. The EU-US Working Group on Cyber-security and Cyber-crime is a good case in point. Established in 2011, it gathers officials from a broad range of institutions on both sides, meeting annually. They have set a joint concept paper, which set specific objectives, priorities and expected deliverables. This dialogue is deemed ‘very successful’ and ‘very operational’, according to EU officials.³¹ Transatlantic dialogues are also quite ambitious, not least since they largely surpass the bilateral dimension, with the aim to coordinate or approximate multilateral positions, and to foster joint efforts in third countries.

Conversely, although the partnerships with Russia and China are highly institutionalized, most dialogues mask certain distrust and lack of cooperation. In this case, the purpose of these dialogues is to be understood in its strictest meaning: to hold regular exchanges and to keep open channels of communication, in order to polish up major divergences and perhaps, in the longer term, to narrow the normative gap. In this case, objectives are less ambitious, outcomes less visible and meetings more orchestrated, often by memoranda of understanding. The EU-China dialogue on cyber-security is a good example thereof. Given that Beijing is perceived more as a source of cyber-insecurity than the contrary in Europe, it is clear that this partnership could deliver little at this stage, and yet it is important to pursue such dialogue as a necessary confidence-building mechanism – not least since there are not equivalent mechanisms at the multilateral level in cyber-security.

Another distinction can be introduced between dialogues aimed at deepening (pre-existing) cooperation in a field, and dialogues aimed at triggering cooperation in a new policy area. In the latter case, the politics of the partnership pre-empt its operational readiness. This is notably the case for the EU-India dialogue on terrorism, or the dialogues on crime with Brazil and Mexico. The problem is that

³¹ Interview with an EEAS official (Brussels, 16 Apr. 2013); interview by email with an official from the E3C (8 Apr. 2013).

even if cooperation stalls following the political impetus, and the specific dialogue produces no results, it is likely to survive nonetheless. Since these dialogues consume financial and human resources, which could be directed to other issues or partnerships, this problem cannot be neglected.

Table 4 The EU's Security Dialogues with Strategic Partners (as of July 2015)

	<i>Dialogues on Non-proliferation</i>		<i>Dialogues on Terrorism</i>		<i>Dialogues on Organized Crime</i>		<i>Dialogues on Cyber-Security</i>	
	MD	PD	MD	PD	MD	PD	MD	PD
Brazil	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	2
Canada	0	4	0	3	0	2	0	1
China	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	2
India	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	2
Japan	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	2
Mexico	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Russia	1	2	1	2	1	3	1	2
South Africa	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
South Korea	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
USA	0	6	1	7	1	6	1	5

*MD means 'Ministerial Dialogues'; PD means 'Policy Dialogues' (political and sectoral). Within ministerial dialogues, we only count those specialized dialogues, hence leaving aside the ministerial meetings between foreign ministers, which address occasionally some of these issues.*³²

Beyond the so-called policy dialogues, some partnerships are also underpinned by ministerial meetings, including on security issues. These ministerial dialogues appear useful to translate recommendations from experts meetings into political decisions. A contrario, they can also identify new priorities in the partnership, which are subsequently pursued at the working level. Overall, the institutional process can therefore be bottom-up and top-down, usually a combination of the two. Whereas policy dialogues may appear useful because they can take some distance with political debates, ministerial meetings may prove necessary precisely to unlock difficult security issues or political tensions.

³² Renard, *supra* n. 3.

5 FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SCOPE OF COOPERATION

The breadth of cooperation between the EU and its partners is conditioned by several factors. First, the EU and its partners might recognize a similar global challenge, albeit differing in their perception and assessment of its concrete incarnations. The world is not the same when looking at it from different capitals, partly due to geopolitical and historical reasons. The EU, the US, China and Russia agree on the principle of non-proliferation, for instance, but their assessment of the Iranian and North Korean cases vary considerably. Even in cases of closer convergence, the perceived level of urgency of a threat can differ widely. The EU and India acknowledge terrorism as a common threat, and they both identify Afghanistan and Pakistan as sources of terrorism (both have been struck by attacks originating from these regions), but the threat is more immediate to neighbouring India than it is to distant Europe.

Second, a certain degree of threat-connectivity between two partners should in theory increase the incentives for cooperation. For instance, drug flows connect Brazil and Mexico with the European continent, via Africa. Criminal organizations are also active between China and Europe, specializing in counterfeiting.³³ As a neighbour, Russia is highly connected to Europe, including with regard to security challenges. Yet, in all these cases, cooperation between the EU and its partners remains limited, notably because these countries do not see the EU's added value, and because they perceive the EU's offer of assistance as intrusive to their internal security, perhaps even diminishing.³⁴

Third, the EU and its partners might differ in their sense of prioritization across challenges. In Europe, for instance, terrorism and non-proliferation have dominated the security agenda for the last decade, whereas countries like Mexico or Brazil have been more focussed on organized crime. When two partners share a similar concern, their priorities can still differ. With regard to cyber-security, for instance, the EU focuses heavily on the economic and governance dimensions, whereas a country like China is more preoccupied with cyber-threats to internal security and regime stability.

Fourth, when the EU and its partners agree to tackle a challenge jointly, they might still disagree on the way to do it. The EU and the US have sided along in counter-terrorism for years, but their cooperation was regularly bogged down by fundamental divergences on how to do counter-terrorism. The US favoured a 'global war on terror' based on a strong military response, whereas Europe (and the EU) promoted a comprehensive response, in which civilian tools largely

³³ Europol, *supra* n. 8.

³⁴ Renard, *Partners in crime? ...*, *supra* n. 3.

dominated. In another instance of disagreement, the EU and (some of) its partners have argued over the sanctions to be imposed on Iran.

Finally, whereas normative proximity is not a pre-condition to entering into a strategic partnership, it can nonetheless facilitate cooperation. The notion of 'shared values' with regard to strategic partners was already present in the 2003 ESS. Furthermore, several EU documents, including the cyber-strategy, clearly encourage cooperation with like-minded countries. This explains to a certain extent why cooperation with Japan is mature and pragmatic, whereas the EU-Russia partnership is under-delivering despite high incentives for cooperation and the existence of many mechanisms for cooperation.

6 ASSESSING THE PARTNERSHIPS

Although security issues are being progressively and increasingly integrated into the EU's strategic partnerships, the overall cooperation remains weak and unequal across issues and partnerships. Overall, there are few joint actions or initiatives to back up the rhetoric. There is thus a certain disconnect between the political and operational levels of strategic partnerships. At the political level, the EU claims to have ten strategic partners, supposedly global and comprehensive by nature. At the operational level, however, these partners are not always particularly strategic. Sometimes, they are not even partners at all. Conversely, some countries that are not deemed to be strategic partners at the highest level appear to be important partners in specific policy areas. For instance, Turkey could be considered a key partner of the EU in certain security dimensions.

A certain degree of heterogeneity stands out from our overview of strategic partnerships in the area of security. Not all relationships are equally developed, and not all partners are equally relevant. Depending on the issue at stake, and depending on the regional focus, pivotal players that need to be engaged diverge. In specific fields, some countries might appear highly valuable partners whereas others might appear more as a source of concern or insecurity. A same country might be a partner in one policy area, and a rival in another one. This clearly limits the potential for cooperation. Russia and China, for example, are pivotal partners in non-proliferation, but they are a source of insecurity in the cyber sphere.

The breadth of cooperation between the EU and each partner vary across policy areas, from being extensive to negligible. The EU's main partners in one field might not be the same as in another one. For instance, cooperation with India is more advanced on counter-terrorism than it is on countering organized crime or ensuring cyber-security. Cooperation with Brazil and Mexico, on the other hand, is more advanced on organized crime than on counter-terrorism. Strategic partnerships are thus not uniform across policy areas.

Overall, the state of the EU's ten strategic partnerships differs. The US is by and large an indispensable partner across all security issues, which makes it perhaps the sole true strategic partner. It is in any case the only partner singled out in all EU security strategies. According to polls, EU citizens perceive similarly the US as the main security partner of the Union, far above any other country.³⁵ Beyond the transatlantic partnership, cooperation appears natural and pragmatic with some partners – even when not much developed – facilitated by a certain level of normative convergence. Japan and South Korea fall into this category, although cooperation with the former is more mature than with the latter. Canada is also a like-minded partner, with the specificity that cooperation on security issues is mostly developed in the shadow of the EU-US partnership. Russia and China are on the other side of the values-spectrum. There is a major normative disconnect with them, which renders cooperation more difficult, or counter-intuitive. In addition to this, they appear at times more as part of the problem than of the solution, whether one look at cyber-security or non-proliferation – not even mentioning security in the European neighbourhood. At the same time, they cannot be simply ignored since their support or approval is necessary to address most security challenges of regional and global scale. They must be engaged in order to address security issues affecting both the bilateral and international levels. In this regard, security dialogues appear to be useful confidence-building mechanisms, albeit with clear limits as demonstrated by the degrading ties with Moscow. Other partners fall somewhere in-between, in terms of values and strategic reaching. This is notably the case of India and Brazil, with which cooperation is more relevant in some fields than in others. Countries like Mexico and South Africa are in the same category, albeit with arguably less strategic clout. They are also the most recent strategic partners (together with South Korea). These partnerships are still in their infancy, and cooperation has yet to mature.

Strategic partnerships reflect a certain strategic vision in Brussels. They have been used to send a political signal at a certain point in time: the EU matters on global stage, and its relations with major powers matter as well. At the operational level, however, the EU has appeared to be more pragmatic. It has pursued partnering in a flexible manner at the bilateral level, allowing for differentiated partnerships across policy areas. Cooperation takes place on the basis of specific needs, and this cooperation is continuously evaluated. This is certainly the sign of a certain strategic maturity from the EU. At the multilateral level, the EU also appears less dogmatic than often assumed with regard to its doctrine of 'effective multilateralism'. It cooperates equally within the UN system and other legally

³⁵ European Commission, *Internal security*, Special Eurobarometer 371 (November 2011); *Transatlantic trends: Key findings 2013* (German Marshall Fund of the US, 2013).

binding regimes, as well as within softer and lighter forms of multilateralism, such as the Gx system. Overall, through this analysis of strategic partnerships in the security area, the EU stands out as being a particularly 'normal' power.

7 THE FUTURE OF SECURITY PARTNERSHIPS

The concept of strategic partnership is intimately connected to security issues. It is hardly imaginable that a strategic partnership worth the name could afford not to put security issues at the centre of its agenda. There is, after all, a very large overlap between strategic and security issues. Besides, the concept was first mentioned in the European *security* strategy, in 2003. But if strategic partnerships do not deliver in the realm of international security, traditionally associated with the strategic dimension, are they really worth the name? Should we question the wisdom of European leaders who condition the security of their citizens to elusive partnerships? The answer should be a nuanced one. The strategic nature of the EU's partnerships depends on several factors, such as the ability to develop mutual trust and a long-term relationship, to connect various policy areas traditionally separated in silos in order to identify mutual interests and possible bargains, or to strengthen the bilateral framework with a view to obtain a multiplier effect at the multilateral level.³⁶ Strategic partnerships go well beyond security. The thinness of cooperation on security issues is thus not sufficient to dismiss the concept of strategic partnership, but it is a strong indication of its current limits.

In the end, one could reasonably wonder whether the current limits of the EU's security partnerships have not more to do with the EU than with its partners. Indeed, the EU is not (yet) a game changer and therefore it is not perceived as a partner of necessity. Although the EU has developed its capabilities and raised its profile, it remains a fledgling security actor. Overall, Brussels is almost entirely dependent on its Member States for operational cooperation. The EU's role consists mostly in framing and institutionalizing cooperation at the European level, and occasionally in complementing Member States, rather than substituting for them. But given the transnational nature of these threats, and their growing importance at the global level, the need for more European coordination is likely to grow. Brussels has thus the potential to become a significant hub for European security in the long-term. This position of hub could become advantageous for Europeans and Europe's partners in a multipolarizing order.

³⁶ Among few others, attempts to define the strategic nature of strategic partnerships have been initiated by, G. Grevi, *Why EU strategic partnerships matter* (FRIDE and Egmont Institute, ESPO Working Paper 1, 2012); N. Hess, *Understanding the EU's strategic partnerships with Brazil, India and South Africa* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Hamburg University, 2013); T. Renard, *The treachery of strategies: A call for true EU strategy*, Egmont Paper 45 (Egmont Institute, 2011); M. Smith, *Beyond the comfort zone: Internal crisis and external challenge in the European Union's response to rising powers*, 89 (3) *Intl. Aff.* 653–671 (2013).

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