



Managing strategic partnerships in a multi-polar world

The EU is engaged in numerous partnerships with a variety of actors, ranging from countries to regional blocs and international organisations. Some of these are characterised as ‘strategic partnerships’, while others are referred to as ‘joint-partnerships’ or ‘joint strategies’, for example.

The European Security Strategy of 2003 gives an indication of what constitutes a strategic partnership: ‘There are few if any problems we can deal with on our own. The threats described above are common threats, shared with all our closest partners. International cooperation is a necessity. We need to pursue our objectives both through multilateral cooperation in international organisations and through partnerships with key actors. [...] **In particular we should look to develop strategic partnerships, with Japan, China, Canada and India as well as with all those who share our goals and values, and are prepared to act in their support** [emphasis added]’.

Between 2003 and 2010, the EU’s bilateral relationships with seven emerging powers – Brazil, China, India, Mexico, Russia, South Africa and South Korea – were upgraded to strategic partnerships (although they continue to incorporate an ODA component). In addition, the EU also has longer established strategic partnerships with Canada, Japan and the United States. This brings the total of bilateral strategic partnerships to ten countries (the ‘lucky 10’) which all belong to the Group of 20. The recent trend has been to build deeper relationships with new global players over the past decade; looking forward, other candidates for future strategic partnerships include: Turkey (although this could prove to be politically challenging given Turkey’s candidacy to becoming an EU Member State), Indonesia, Pakistan and Nigeria, along with some countries from the Gulf (Renard, 2012).

Elements of a successful bilateral strategic partnership

Strategic partnerships fulfil three main functions:

- A **‘reflexive’ function**, meaning that the EU self-asserts itself as a partner in the international arena.
- A **management function** for bilateral relationships, especially in the areas of trade and economics.
- A **structural role in enhancing global governance** by mobilising bilateral means to address issues at the international level (Grevi, 2012).

EU framework for bilateral partnerships

The EU celebrates bilateral summits with each of its partners, launches common action plans and establishes multi-dimensional cooperation at the bilateral, regional and global levels under each strategic partnership (Gratius, 2011). While most core issues differ across the partnerships, trade and investment seem to be issues of particular importance, as they feature in all of them.

The choice of countries and the reasons for engaging with them are directly linked to the interests at stake and are not the result of an overarching foreign policy strategy.

Overview of the EU's strategic partnerships (SPs)				
Bilateral	Core issues	Aid	FTA	Nature of SP
Brazil (2007)	Trade (10th partner), environment, energy	Yes	Negotiations Mercosur since 1999	Limited, value and interests based asymmetric SP
Canada (no official SP declaration)	All-inclusive, focus on values, global peace, environment, energy, trade (11th partner) and investment	No	Negotiations since 2009	All-inclusive, like-minded SP
China (2003)	Trade (2nd partner), investment, human rights	Yes	No (PCA)	Limited, interest based asymmetric SP
India (2008)	Trade (8th partner), investment, security	Yes	Negotiations since 2006	Limited, value and interest based asymmetric SP
Japan (no declaration)	Trade (6th partner), investment, development, peace	No	No (in consideration)	Limited, like minded SP
Mexico (2009)	Trade (19th partner), investment, development, (public security)	Yes	Yes (2000)	Limited, like minded SP
Russia (2009)	Trade (3rd partner), energy	Yes	No (PCA)	Limited, interest based SP
South Africa (2006)	Development, trade (13th partner), regional peace	Yes	Yes (2008)	Limited, development focused SP
South Korea (2010)	Trade (9th partner), development, democracy	Yes	Yes (2010)	Limited, like-minded SP
United States (1990)	All-inclusive (1st trade partner)	No	Imminent launch of negotiations for a comprehensive trade and investment agreement	Like-minded, value and interests based on asymmetric SP
Source: Gratius (2011) based on EU official documents. Note: PCA = Partnership and Cooperation Agreement				

To date, the seven most recent partners still receive aid from the EU. However, as a result of the EU's policy of differentiation, these countries will no longer be eligible to receive EU bilateral aid from 2014.

The Partnership Instrument

The Partnership Instrument will replace the ‘financing instrument for cooperation with industrialised and other high income countries and territories’ (ICI), which expires at the end of 2013. Therefore a new financial instrument is needed to replace it. The Partnership Instrument will allow the EU to pursue agendas beyond development cooperation with global players, but also to defend core EU interests with any other partner country, as the need arises. It could also underpin new relationships with countries graduating from bilateral development assistance.

Its three specific objectives are to:

- (a) implement the international dimension of the ‘Europe 2020’ strategy by supporting EU bilateral, regional and interregional cooperation partnership strategies, by promoting policy dialogues and by developing collective approaches and responses to challenges of global concern, such as energy security, climate change and environment;
- (b) improve market access and developing trade, investment and business opportunities for European companies, in particular SMEs, by means of economic partnerships and business and regulatory cooperation;
- (c) enhance widespread understanding and visibility of the Union and its role on the world scene by means of public diplomacy, education/academic cooperation and outreach activities to promote the Union’s values and interests.

Source :

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/documents/prop_reg_partnership_instrument_en.pdf

Other EU strategic relationships

Regional partnerships

The EU is engaged in a number of strategic relationships with regional blocs in addition to its 10 bilateral strategic partnerships. Below are three examples of such strategic relationships.

- The **Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)**, created in 1996, is an informal process of dialogue and cooperation bringing the 27 EU Member States, the European Commission, Norway and Switzerland together with 20 Asian countries and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat. The ASEM dialogue addresses political, economic and cultural issues, with the objective of strengthening the relationship between the two regions. The summits reaffirm the different areas of collaboration between the two regions, many of which cover development cooperation issues.
- The **EU-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) strategic partnership**, created in 2010, held its latest summit in January 2013. The partners issued a two-year action plan on areas including: science, research, innovation and technology; sustainable development; environment; climate change; biodiversity; energy; regional integration and interconnectivity to promote social inclusion cohesion; migration; education and employment to promote social inclusion and cohesion; gender and investments and entrepreneurship for sustainable development.
- The relationship between the **EU and Africa** is governed by two frameworks: the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP), enshrined in the 1975 Lomé Convention, updated in 2000 by the **Cotonou Agreement**; and more recently, the **Joint-EU Africa Strategy (JAES)**, conceived at the 2007 EU-Africa summit in Lisbon, which reflects the pan-African dimension. The strategy focuses on eight areas of collaboration, including: peace and security; democratic governance and human rights; regional economic integration, trade and infrastructure; Millennium Development Goals; climate change; and migration, mobility and employment.

Institutional partnerships

To ensure greater collaboration in common areas of interest, the EU has also set up a series of strategic partnerships with international organisations. For example, strategic partnerships have been established with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Conclusion

While the EU has strategic partnerships or relationships with a number of actors, its partnership with the 'lucky 10' clearly stands out and implies a strong focus on establishing ties with influential countries founded in mutual economic and commercial interests. Unlike bilateral strategic partnerships, region to region relationships are much more centred on development cooperation.

Issues for discussion

- What is the future of the EU bilateral strategic partnerships? Are they aid driven, and if so, what will happen once those countries are no longer eligible for EU aid? How will the relationships move toward equal partnerships?
- Why are development aspects mostly covered in regional partnerships rather than bilateral partnerships?
- How can these partnerships be used to tackle development challenges? What should the EU do to ensure it remains an attractive partner in the eyes of countries that are strategic, or will become strategic?

Further Reading

On the Partnership Instrument:

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/documents/prop_reg_partnership_instrument_en.pdf

Gratius, S. (2011) 'The EU and the 'special ten': deepening or widening Strategic Partnerships?', *Policy Brief N. 76*, Madrid: FRIDE.

Grevi, G. (2012) 'Why EU strategic partnerships matter', *ESPO Working Paper n.1*, June 2012, European Strategic Partnerships Observatory.

Hess, N. (2012) 'EU Relations with "Emerging" Strategic Partners: Brazil, India and South Africa', *GIGA Focus International* Edition/English, Number 4, 2012.

Renard, T. (2012) 'The EU Strategic Partnerships Review: Ten Guiding Principles', *ESPO Policy Brief 2*, April 2012.

Rogers, J. and Simón, L. (2012) 'Think again: 'strategic partnerships'', *European Gestrategy*, 23 May 2012 [online source].

European Strategic Partnerships Observatory website:
<http://www.fride.org/project/28/european-strategic-partnerships-observatory>