The EU and China: emerging global powers capable of countering US hegemony and shaping a multipolar world order?

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Introduction

• Post-Cold War world order characterized by unipolarity and US hegemony
• Increasingly interconnected and interdependent – global issues have to be addressed by all global actors
• Emerging global powers such as the EU and China are more and more putting this US dominance into question
• Both actors believe that a multipolar world order would provide for a more secure and stable world
• Can the EU and China counter US hegemony and shape a multipolar world order?
The EU, China and their belief in a multipolar world

• The EU and China are important emerging global actors
• Evolution of the EU-China relationship
• Recognition by both actors of the need for global problems to be addressed globally
• One of the main priorities for the EU is the integration of China into the international community
• Both actors seem to promote the importance of multilateralism
The EU, China and their belief in a multipolar world

“The EU and China share views on the importance of multilateral systems and rules of global governance, which includes the further strengthening of the United Nations system, its role in regional and global conflict resolution and in the co-ordination of actions addressing global concerns” - 2003 Commission Communication, a maturing partnership – shared interests and challenges in EU-China relations”.
The EU, China and their belief in a multipolar world

- But when we look closer, we realize their vision of multilateralism is not the same
- EU’s vision of “effective multilateralism” outlined in the ESS: “the development of a stronger international society, well-functioning international institutions and a rule-based international order”
- China’s vision refers to multipolarity rather than multilateralism: a balanced distribution of powers amongst the different global actors – importance of sovereignty, non-interference with each others affairs.
- Value of international law and effective international institutions >> great multiplicity of power poles
The failure of the EU to act as a coherent actor in external relations

- Multilevel decision-making procedure in external relations: EU competence, CFSP competence and Member State competence
- Illustration: arms embargo issue – disagreements between the different EU institutions and different member states – “shambolic mess”
- Undermines the EU’s capacity to act as a strong and serious international actor
- Improvement with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty?
The relationship between the EU, the US and China

• Importance of the US for the EU – ESS: “one of the core elements of the international system is the transatlantic relation”.
• But recently some tensions between both actors – cf. War in Iraq/fight against terror
• They more or less have the same goal vis-à-vis China: integration into the international community and make China become a responsible international actor
• But, contrarily to the US, the EU has no real security and defence interests/responsibilities in the region
• Illustration of the weight of the US on EU-China relationship: Arms embargo issue
The relationship between the EU, the US and China

- Important recent events: global financial crisis and China’s role in the Copenhagen Climate change conference
- Do these recent events illustrate a modification in the power relations between the three actors?
Conclusion

• The US still remains the most important global power
• But emerging global actors such as the EU and China are playing an increasing role in world politics
• China has recently shown that it is well aware of the fact that it is becoming an uncontested international actor
• The US has to realize that good relations with the EU and China are needed for it to retain its status as the main superpower
• The EU has to become a more coherent external actor if it wants to play a real role in world politics
Conclusion

• The world order seems to be shifting towards more multipolarity, characterized by the existence of different poles of power.
• These poles nevertheless do not have the same power.
• Too soon to draw real conclusions out of recent events.
• Different potential scenarios have been put forward:
  – Bipolar world: US and China superpowers
  – ‘Triumvirate’ composed of the EU, the US and China
  – Major role for China (with the other BRIC countries).
• Still unclear in which way the world order is going to evolve, but the EU and China are definitely playing a role in the redefinition.