

THE COMPLEX INTERPLAY OF EU-CHINA AND EU-HKSAR RELATIONS

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Abstrak

Sejarah kolonial yang unik membuat Hong Kong menjalankan sistem kebijakan “Satu Negara, Dua Sistem Pemerintahan”. Pada masa awal Hong Kong dikembalikan, sistem kebijakan tersebut tidak menimbulkan masalah berarti. Namun, dalam beberapa tahun belakangan, sistem kebijakan “Satu Negara, Dua Sistem Pemerintahan” mulai menuai ketegangan diantaranya terkait dengan Gerakan Payung 2014, penahanan mahasiswa yang melakukan demonstrasi, dan rangkaian insiden penting seperti hilangnya lima orang penerbit buku. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap konsistensi Uni Eropa mempromosikan norma demokrasi dalam hubungannya dengan HKSAR. Dengan menggunakan teknik analisa wacana pada dokumen Uni Eropa yang relevan, artikel ini membahas dua hal. Pertama, menyelidiki apakah ketegangan yang terjadi mengarah pada kemungkinan sikap ke(tidak)konsistensian ujaran Uni Eropa dan bagaimana sebenarnya tindakannya mengenai perselisihan antara Hong Kong dan China. Kedua, menganalisa konsistensi wacana Uni Eropa yang sebagian besar menekankan promosi nilai dan norma demokrasi.

Kata kunci:

Hubungan Uni Eropa-China, "Satu Negara, Dua Sistem", kebijakan luar negeri, wacana, hak pilih universal, hak asasi manusia

Abstract

Due to a unique colonial history, Hong Kong today operates under the “One Country, Two Systems” framework. In the years immediately following the handover, it was generally thought that this was working quite well. In recent years, however, tensions have arisen within the “One Country, Two Systems” model, most notably including the 2014 Umbrella Movement, the imprisonment of student protesters and various notable incidents like the disappearance of five book publishers. This article aims to uncover how consistent the EU is in promoting democratic norms in its relations with the HKSAR. Using discourse analysis of relevant EU documents, the article explores two things. Firstly, to investigate whether these tensions lead to potential (in)consistencies between what the EU says and how it in fact acts regarding disputes between Hong Kong and China. Secondly, since a large part of EU discourse stresses the promotion of values and norms such as democracy, this article analyses the consistency of this discourse.

Keywords:

EU-China relations, “One Country, Two Systems”, foreign policy, discourse, universal suffrage, human rights

INTRODUCTION

“What are we for, what do we believe, what are we prepared to do? ... Do we have in Europe any remaining value-driven vision of the world?”

(Patten, 1998)

These words of former Commissioner for External Relations, Chris Patten, highlight the common criticism towards the European Union (EU) and its foreign policy. Scholars accuse the EU of pursuing an incoherent and inconsistent foreign policy (Risse & Babayan, 2015; Smith, 2001; Youngs, 2009). There is also much discussion on what kind of power the EU is, whether it is a civilian, normative or even imperialist power (Andreatta & Zambonardi, 2017). However, these discussions of what sort of actor it is begin to matter less if the EU cannot be viewed as consistent in the first place.

Acting coherently is especially important when looking at relations with the world's second largest economic power, China. It remains uncertain if Patten had China on his mind when he said the above words, but he may well have, as he was the last Governor of Hong Kong (HK) before it returned to Chinese control after 156 years of British rule. However, his quote points to the crux of the issue this article seeks to explore.

EU-China relations are a salient topic of research, not only in terms of trade and security, but also in terms of democracy and human rights promotion. According to the Commission, the EU must project a “strong, clear and unified voice” in its approach to China (2016, p.4). The document also states “The EU's external action is governed by the principles which have inspired its own creation: democracy, the rule of law and human rights”. The aspect of EU-China relations this article focuses on is whether the potential uneasy coexistence between normative concerns and material interests of the EU in China (Christiansen, Kirchner & Murray, 2015) impacts or not on the EU's consistency as a foreign policy actor in this region.

The focus on HK as a narrower case study within EU-China relations is this paper's chosen response to the wider puzzle of consistency and coherence of EU foreign policy (EFP) in China. On the one hand, analysing HK as a case may provide the final nail in the coffin, as it were, in terms of concluding once and for all that the EU is an inherently inconsistent actor. On the other hand, whilst there seems to exist an extensive consensus on the EU's disappointing track record in foreign policy consistency, HK's

ever-increasing strategic importance to the EU may reveal itself to be enough to incentivise the EU to act more in line with its stated foreign policy aspirations.

A brief history is necessary to demonstrate why and how HK has evolved to be different to mainland China in certain ways. After being under British rule, HK was returned to mainland China after the signing of the Sino-British Declaration and launching of the Hong Kong Basic Law in 1997. Under the principle of “One Country, Two Systems”, it was agreed between the Chinese and the British that HK would retain a high degree of autonomy in all matters except defence and foreign policy. This situation will remain until 2047, marking the year HK completes its transition to becoming an integrated part of the PRC, when its present constitutional arrangements will expire.

HK’s “semi-democratic” (Burns, 2017) political system survived the transition mostly unchanged. This has allowed the EU to gradually develop mature, broad and in-depth relations with HK. In recent years, however, tensions have arisen within the One Country, Two Systems model, peaking during the 2014 Umbrella Movement (part of the wider democratic movement, Occupy Central).

Thus, the article explores two things. Firstly, to investigate whether these tensions lead to potential (in)consistencies between what the EU *says* and how it in fact *acts* regarding disputes between HK and China. Secondly, since a large part of EU discourse stresses the promotion of values and norms such as democracy, this article analyses the consistency of this discourse. In particular, the “more talk and less action” debate surrounding EU democracy promotion in HK makes it relevant to understand this more in-depth. Analysing these two elements of consistency will contribute more broadly to uncovering possible tensions between, on the one hand, *actual* EFP and on the other, its *aspirations* towards a value-based foreign policy more generally,

Therefore, the research question posed is: *How consistent is the EU in promoting democratic norms in its relations with the HKSAR?* A discourse analysis of various EU documents, debates and speeches is done to answer this. This article argues that, despite a scholarly consensus that the result should be otherwise, the EU achieves high levels of consistency both in terms of discourse and in terms of actions in its foreign policy towards HK.

This research is important as, whilst there is an established debate on the strengths and flaws of EFP, little has been written about EU-HK foreign policy specifically. This article makes a step towards filling this gap. An important purpose of the research is to better uncover the Union’s approach to a city that is not only becoming an increasingly

vital region to the EU, but as a case study that can help contribute to the broader debates on relations between HK's "mother", China, and the EU. Finally, research on "value-based" foreign policy has societal relevance because foreign policy making has to be open to scrutiny to ensure actors are living up to their own standards they set themselves. This is especially important for the EU, a body that increasingly sees itself as a global actor and external governor. All these reasons make this a fascinating object of analysis and research well worth pursuing.

The structure of this article proceeds as follows. Initially a short state of the art is outlined, followed by the analytical framework, including an explanation and justification of the chosen conceptual framework and also of the methodology I undertake. What follows is an analysis of both the levels of discursive consistency in terms of two factors, time and institutions, and of consistency between words and actions. Lastly, concluding statements are made.

EU foreign policy towards third countries - plagued by double standards?

Before proceeding to the analysis, it is necessary to outline the state of the art, followed by the conceptual framework and the methodology derived from this. Some literature focuses on the quality of EFP concerning democratic norm promotion more generally, whilst other literature focuses more specifically on the relationship between the EU and China, or the EU and HK, in this sphere. There are several common themes that emerge, all relevant to this study.

The first theme is that the EU has recently made efforts to transition from a continental to a global actor (Ferreira-Pereira, 2010; Lucarelli, 2006; Youngs, 2009). This discussion is important to this research because it helps justify the choice of research puzzle and chosen concepts to be measured.

The second theme, most important for this research, is inconsistency. The general scholarly consensus is that the EU is lacking consistency in its foreign policy and external action, which leads to shortcomings in its overall strategic approach (Ferreira-Pereira, 2010; Risse & Babayan, 2015; Smith, 2001; Youngs, 2009). Risse and Babayan (2015) argue the EU needs to better match their words and deeds, to walk the walk, as it were, otherwise they lose credibility and the target's reliance on them is harmed. Smith (2001) goes as far as to argue that the EU does not *have* a foreign policy because this is a divided competence with Member States (MS) and that the way the EU makes foreign policy is an obstacle to its achievement of a consistent approach to human rights. Even though it

appears this debate is not a hugely contentious one, it is important not to go into the analysis assuming that finding inconsistency will be self-evident.

Four potential explanations appear as for why this inconsistency may exist. The first is that the EU is “flexible” in how strongly it pushes for these principles depending on the other actor involved, their strategic importance and the EU’s other interests (Lucarelli, 2006). Essentially, the EU is not always able or willing to extend its norms to third countries. It will be interesting to see if I draw similar conclusions.

The second explanation is what Börzel (2015) terms the “democratisation- stability dilemma”. It suggests the more unstable a country is and hence the greater impact democratisation would have, the less likely EU democracy promotion is to be effective.

HK is specifically discussed by Börzel (2015), who argues China is too important to the EU for it to openly support HK in their quest for democratisation. She hypothesises that

Western democracy promoters only react to non-democratic regional powers if they prioritise human rights and democracy ahead of stability and security (Börzel, 2015).

Thus, she concludes that it is “unclear” how far and how actively the EU attempts to promote democracy in HK. This idea of the EU not being unequivocally committed to

HRD promotion, preferring to pursue stability over democracy, is shared by other scholars (Risse & Babayan, 2015; Panebianco, 2006; Smith, 2014; Youngs, 2009). This argument will be kept in mind whilst undertaking the discourse analysis.

For Risse and Babayan (2015), the impact of EU democracy promotion is conditioned by economic and security links between and among the three actors (in this case the EU, China and HK) and by external actors’ leverage (the EU and China) on the domestic forces (HK). Panebianco (2006) mirrors these authors’ feelings in believing security concerns are often what guides foreign policy. She goes further than others, though, in being reluctant to term EFP as “valued” at all because of the role security plays in its formation. For her, this security-value axis demonstrates the inconsistencies of such policy that the EU must attempt to overcome when trying to export a culturally derived concept of human rights, something not as universal as it may appear (Panebianco, 2006). Youngs (2009) is slightly less pessimistic in concluding that although strategic concerns have never completely stalled or superseded the EU’s democratisation agenda in China, the EU has also not driven this agenda forward in a comprehensive or coherent way. Youngs’s (2009) perceives democracy promotion as being handled as a separate policy domain rather than one conditioning and informing other objectives, treated more as an “add on” rather than as an essential underpinning informing other policy decisions.

The third explanation for inconsistency takes a different stance and implies MS exclusively seek national interests in EFP, prohibiting an overall ability to act effectively and consistently on a common EU-level ((Ferreira-Pereira, 2010; Cameron, 2009; Rees, 2009; Smith, 2014; Youngs, 2009). Christiansen et al (2015) argue the EU is not a coherent actor in Asia because of the fact bilateral trade relations take precedence. MS continue to carry out a national policy towards China, the three biggest MS (Germany, the UK and France) being the worst offenders (2015). They go even further in arguing that, compared to the EU institutions, such MS give less priority to observing the rule of law and human rights on the continent.

The fourth explanation relates to the idea certain EU institutions may take more explicit stances on normative foreign policy issues than others, the European Parliament (Parliament) often being seen as the most vocal (Cameron, 2009; Balme, 2008; Shen, 2015). Related to this, Youngs (2009) questions whether it is the EU's structure which most weakens its capacity to engage in purposive and coordinated action abroad, but eventually concludes this is not the main explanation. This institutional aspect is an object of analysis later in the paper.

Not all relevant literature takes the EU as the subject. Many authors take China as the focus. Chen and Kinzelbach (2015) analyse whether or not China is able to stifle EU and US efforts at democracy promotion. They conclude that China can do this when it wishes to. They further argue that the support the EU has shown to HK has been limited and conclude that the EU and the US tend to respect any red lines Beijing has, reluctant to burden their relations with China in the name of democracy. By extension, Chen and Kinzelbach (2015) argue activists cannot rely on resolute international support, echoing earlier arguments.

There are gaps in the literature this research can fill. There is a wealth of literature on HK's current "predicament" (Lee, 2017; Ortmann, 2015; Ortmann, 2016; Zhang, 2010) and more generally on the development of EU-China relations (Caira, 2010; Cameron, 2015; Christiansen et al, 2015; Taneja, Wilson & Wiessala, 2009), yet next to nothing has been written combining the many elements covered by this state of the art and furthermore applying them in the context of EU-HK relations. Thus, this article aims to contribute by bringing together the various issues identified in the literature review in order to answer the research question.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

After providing a review of the literature to identify the significant issues within this area of research, this chapter presents the conceptual framework. Social constructivism is the conceptual lens chosen through which to interpret this research. Social constructivism holds the view that the “building blocks of international reality are ideational as well as material and that ideational factors have normative as well as instrumental dimensions” (Ruggie as cited in Christiansen, Jorgensen & Wiener, 1999). Social constructivists believe concepts and beliefs are significant in shaping interstate action.

In addition, concepts and beliefs can convey values and norms an actor perceives as important and appropriate in the global context, for example democracy promotion worldwide. The identity of an agent has an impact on their beliefs about the nature of the world and what works within it. Essentially, this concept sheds light on the impact of norms and ideas on the construction of identities and behaviours. Consequently, concepts and beliefs can be well-applied to the case at hand, considering how the EU’s self-perception affects their relationship towards other actors, such as China or HK. Thus, this will be borne in mind throughout the analysis.

Although much literature believes EFP to be driven by security, economic and other strategic interests, social constructivism is one of the most appropriate conceptual frameworks for the analysis of EU-HK relations. This research focuses on whether values can be and are still present in EFP towards HK when confronted with an illiberal actor such as China. Furthermore, other authors have successfully applied social constructivism to the study of EU external relations and foreign policy (Geeraerts, 2006; Aydin-Düzgit, 2015), proving it is well equipped to enable new insights in this research. The EU is itself a social construction, promoting values and norms such as democracy, freedom and the rule of law, to create an identity and perception of itself as a normative power. This is especially the case regarding how the EU sees itself as a democracy promoter in its external action, a role where identity construction plays a vital part.

In this research’s context, “democratic norms” are defined to encompass both the promotion and protection of human rights, the rule of law, democracy and other related fundamental civic rights. “Democracy” is a contested, fluid and context dependent concept. Thus, “democratisation” is defined in the specific and unique context of HK. HK people enjoy some democratic elements. However, the only elections with true universal suffrage are in District Council elections and for only one half of the Legislative Council

(the other half are functional seats, elected by a specific sector of the population). The Chief Executive is elected by an electoral college.

Thus, when protesting in late 2014 for “democracy”, what the HK people were pursuing was the chance to directly elect their head of government from a list of candidates not hand-picked by the Beijing government. The not so democratic element of having just under half the legislature chosen by an exclusive subset of the potential electorate took a back seat in the 2014 protests, yet is another key democratic deficiency nonetheless. These various (admittedly complex) elements are what is meant by “democratisation” whenever it is alluded to in the context of this research.

A further important element to keep in mind is that in the HK case, a key element of their struggle is the *preservation* of the norms, values and freedoms they currently have. While many still strive for the ultimate goal of universal suffrage, many citizens see their efforts as being most efficiently directed towards trying simply to maintain the political and legal status quo in terms of personal autonomy, without allowing this to decrease any further.

METHODOLOGY

In light of the conceptual framework, it is now possible to outline the methodology.

Case Selection

This research concerns the single, intrinsic case study of HK. HK is an important case to analyse because of its unusual present position, and because of its “uniqueness as an entity” (European Commission, 1997, p.1). As a semi-autonomous region, it is not a country, but can be interpreted as many contrasting things, depending on the viewer’s stance. For example, many view HK as a global city, a gateway between Asia and the rest of the world. Simultaneously, others (such as the Chinese government) understand it to be on the same administrative level as a Chinese province. In objective, legal terms, it is neither fully sovereign nor fully under Beijing’s rule (at present).

Whilst research may have been conducted on the EU’s relations with other post-colonial nation-states, HK is special in its status as being relatively newly “decolonised” (or as some go as far as to argue, “recolonised”) and thus requires further research. The only other SAR existing in China is Macau, which would have also been a valid case choice. However, HK is more pertinent for two reasons. Firstly, relations are more

established with HK than with Macau. Secondly, HK had the interesting development of the Umbrella Movement, something Macau did not.

The specificity of HK as a case limits the capacity of this article to generalise the findings to other countries, as in only assessing one case I face the “small n” problem. However, the benefits of choosing HK outweigh the limitations posed by the “small-n” issue. Results could be used in wider application of other “sham” democracies the EU is involved in. Furthermore, research here makes a valuable contribution to, and speaks to the wider issue of, EU-China relations. By better understanding how consistent the EU is in its foreign policy approach to HK, we can better understand the EU’s foreign policy approach to China. The findings may in the future be applied to other similar cases within the China context such as Taiwan or Macau.

The time period covered is 1997 to today, this start point being chosen as it marked a transition in HK’s political system. Choosing the present day as the end point, despite running the risk of trying to analyse a “moving target”, is appropriate because of key events having been so recent. Developments in the city are constantly evolving. Within an EU context, this time period is also interesting to analyse as many developments have occurred in the field of EU external action, such as the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty which created the European External Action Service (EEAS) in 2011.

Data Collection And Method

Discourse analysis is the method of analysis employed. In order to select the sources for analysis, the EurLex database was searched, using the terms “Hong Kong”, “China” and “One Country, Two Systems” to retrieve all annual reports and other related documents, such as the Parliament resolutions, Commission communications and Council declarations. In addition, the websites of the EEAS and the EU Office in HK were searched for relevant speeches and press releases, and the relevant Parliament debate transcripts found. A total of 3 debates and 40 documents was analysed, 19 of which are the annual reports. A variety of documents were analysed to provide a wider spectrum of EU discourse.

An eclectic combination of provisional, holistic, descriptive, simultaneous, umbrella and value coding were applied to the qualitative data. Various cycles of coding occurred. The literature that guided the analytic process were Gee’s *How to do Discourse Analysis: a Toolkit* (2011) and Saldaña’s *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (2016). First, the documents relevant to each institution were analysed to

ascertain if there were differences in discourse between the four institutions (the Council, the Parliament, the Commission and the EEAS). Then, the annual reports were analysed to see if the discourse has altered over the last two decades. Manual coding was used throughout.

Discourse analysis is an appropriate method to analyse EFP because this method is committed to a strong social constructivist view in the way it explores the relationships between text, discourse and context. A further justification of the method is that discourse conveys norms, values, attitudes, motivations or identities that shape EFP. This makes discourse and the norms contained within it an independent variable explaining (at least partly) foreign policy outcomes (Diez, 2014). The research puzzle is one where central aspects include both the wider context of complex geopolitical relations and also analysing an actor that “talks” a lot, speaking and writing making up a considerable part of the EU’s action. Making statements, speeches and resolutions is one key tool the EU has in foreign policy. This is one reason the discourse analysis literature in the field of EFP has grown in line with the recent developments in the EU’s increased role as a global actor.

Before beginning the document analysis, their context was considered. Then, a preliminary list of codes was compiled, refined throughout the analysis and resulting in 45 codes. From an in-depth analysis of the texts, various discourse strands were identified, analysed below.

Consistency As A Measurement

The article aims to measure the consistency of the EU’s foreign policy towards HK. To measure this in the most concrete, empirical way possible, the level of four different areas of consistency are ascertained. Before outlining how this is done, what is *not* going to be measured is explained.

There are many terms that have similar, overlapping or related meanings to consistency, such as coherence, actorness, effectiveness and legitimacy. Yet, these are not concepts this article has an interest in. The key idea being measured is consistency - whether the EU practices what it preaches.

Consistency across institutions is the first to be measured. This characteristic is worth evaluating because the EU’s institutional structure and the institutions themselves make up a vital part of the EU’s actorness and any related (in)consistency. An additional justification is that the literature has alluded to potential elements of non-uniformity in

this area. This is measured by undertaking a discourse analysis of the text of various institutional documents, such as Commission communications, declarations by the Council Presidency, speeches given by various EU representatives and press releases from across institutions.

The second kind of consistency examined is consistency over time. This is an appropriate form to measure because an important aspect of the wider research puzzle is this idea of China's gradual rise in influence for both the EU and HK. Thus, it makes sense to examine any alterations in the EU's discourse over the years. The fact there are annual Commission reports as a concrete and substantial form of analysis to compare further justifies this measurement. Consistency across time is measured by applying discourse analysis to text used in annual Commission reports on the EU-HK relationship, starting from 1998 to the most recent, in 2017. I will firstly analyse the discourse strands that appear and whether these consistently reappear or are more evolutionary, and secondly will see if the EU follows through on promises it makes.

A third type of consistency that could have been analysed is consistency across MS. However, this has been avoided for two reasons. Firstly, not all 28 MS can be studied, so a case selection would have to be made, with many options available. Secondly, the overwhelming opinion in the literature is that MS have diverging foreign policy objectives *anyway*, thus the analytical contribution could end up being small, the eventual conclusions already somewhat predictable. It is preferred to focus on fewer elements in greater detail instead.

DISCUSSIONS

The analysis is split into four sections. The first section evaluates consistency across institutions. The second section investigates consistency across time. The third section examines consistency across both time and institutions. The final section analyses consistency between words and actions.

Before beginning the analysis, an explanation of the rationale behind EU HRD policy is beneficial. The rationale behind the EU's democracy promotion is based on a combination of factors, including a desire to foster identity derived normative interests as well as more traditional security and economic goals. Within the EU treaties, various values are referred to as being essential to the EU's actorness.

It is essential to consider why inconsistency is negative at all. Inconsistency can end up “exposing” the EU’s *true* priorities. Secondly, inconsistencies can undermine the international profile the EU has attempted to construct, making its commitments less credible and leaving it open to accusations of hypocrisy and double standards. Inconsistency acts as a big setback to the EU’s self-portrayal as a principled actor. Christiansen et al (2015) argue inconsistency threatens their credibility as a normative power. Furthermore, the recent creation of the EEAS had the explicit aim of helping strengthen the EU’s presence globally and to enable it to “project its values and interests more efficiently” (EEAS, 2016). The Treaty on European Union (TEU) in fact states that the EU shall ensure consistency in its external action. (TEU, Article 21(3)).

Consistency Across The Institutions

The first element of consistency to be ascertained is across institutions. A key finding was in terms of the language used, and therefore sense of commitment to the cause. Whilst the EEAS, Council and Commission did all state commitment to HK’s democratic development, the Parliament’s tone exhibits clear differences. The verbs and adjectives used by Parliament consistently were more direct, robust and outspoken in nature, the best examples being “deplore”, “repudiate”, “staunch defender”, and “must”. These are words the other institutions never use in their discourse, or only start using in recent years.

Some of the strongest evidence for discursive inconsistency between the institutions is found in the three parliamentary debates held on HK. As evidence of the Parliament’s discursive difference when compared with the other institutions, numerous discourse strands appear in the debates that do not ever occur elsewhere in EU discourse. There were nine such key discourse strands identified.

The first is criticism of EU inaction on HK, expressing the feeling the EU has not done enough. Many members expressed open regret at the EU’s silence on HK during the protests. For example, MEP Marietje Schaake says

From Ashton’s side it has been too quiet. From the Council’s side it has been too quiet. From Juncker ... we expect more ... It is clear that this House is now the one that will have to push for external action based on values, otherwise the EU will be irrelevant.

Indeed, there were no Council declarations or EP resolutions published during the protests or in their aftermath.

A second differing discursive strand that emerged was a more demanding, direct approach towards the HK and Chinese governments. The Parliament is more likely to specify ways the HK government must change its approach and to request for the Chinese government to act. Parliament are the only institution whose discourse occasionally speaks negatively about China. Furthermore, whilst the Commission and Council documents call on the *HK* Government to make sure the rule of law and various freedoms are maintained, the Parliament calls on *China* to ensure these within the context of an HK related parliamentary debate.

A third interesting discourse that emerged is that the EU is discussing the wrong subject, that there should not be discussions on the situation in HK but on the bigger picture of trying to install democracy in China. Certain MEPs are openly scathing of the EU's approach towards HK and China. Nowhere in the other institutions' discourse does any mention of supporting democracy in China emerge.

A fourth way the Parliament's discourse differs is in how they use intertextuality, the process of texts referring to other texts through reference to similar themes, events and the transfer of arguments to reinforce a discourse. Interestingly, reference is made to Tiananmen Square by MEPs, an event *never* referred to in other institutions' discourses. This is arguably evidence of a braver institution not scared to make reference to an event the Chinese government ignores.

A fifth related discursive difference is how none of the documents or diplomatic speeches of other institutions ever refer to China in terms of its political system, yet MEPs call China out as being authoritarian. Thus, there is inconsistency in terms of how the institutions categorise, identify and deal with China.

A sixth new discourse strand that appears often in the debates, but is virtually absent from the Commission reports, is the importance of tackling HK's economic inequality alongside and ideally before the democratisation process. Any discussion of social issues and linking these to democratisation is completely absent from the discourse of the Council, EEAS or Commission.

Furthermore, it is only in the debates that mention is made of the EU's approach to HK and China as having a negative impact on its image as a global actor. MEP Fredrick Federley says

If we do not speak up when fundamental democratic principles are manipulated, then we also send another type of message: we tell those students that democracy is important for us... but we do not really care if other people live in a democratic society or not.

A further, related, discourse that emerges from MEPs but does not appear elsewhere is the idea the EU must rethink its entire foreign policy towards China and more generally that the EU should choose which countries to partner with not just in terms of size but also values. This argument is nowhere to be seen in the discourse of other institutions.

A final contrasting discourse that appears in these debates is that the EU is in solidarity with the HK people and has sympathy for them. Such a strong expression of support does not appear in the Commission reports or Council Declarations. The closest they get is by giving offers of “strong support”. Other institutions’ discourse concerns support more for the democratisation process itself rather than for the people’s wellbeing.

Despite many inconsistencies in discourse, some consistency can be found. One consistency between the Parliament’s discourse and the Commission’s is repeated reference to encouragement of, and a faith in, dialogue and debate as a way to improve the political situation, a recurring discourse strand in the annual Commission reports and came up in Parliament resolutions and debates.

In addition, the same key discourse strands that have appeared in the annual reports (discussed in more detail in the next chapter) appear in the Parliamentary debates as well. These include: the desire universal suffrage be achieved; that it is the people’s wish to have universal suffrage; and that HK has managed to foster characteristics of a free society that should be maintained. This shows consistency across institutions in terms of subjects of discourse.

An example of consistency is how hopeful their discourses are that peaceful agreement could be found during the protests and that progress on electoral reform can occur. Individual MEPs’ discourse is hopeful, many expressing not only hope the situation will be resolved but also a *belief* it will. Expressions of hope and optimism in the Commission reports are also present, but fluctuate as time progresses, discussed later. When an analysis of the frequency of positive terms versus negative terms appearing across documents was conducted, generally the Commission and the EEAS present the situation in an overall optimistic way. Speeches by EEAS officials are consistently highly

positive in outlook as it is their prerogative to present EU-HK relations as positively as possible.

The following section shows that there is a gradual shift in how pessimistic and critical the EU is of the political and legal situation in HK. Yet, even in the earlier years, the Parliament's language is more critical, outspoken, stern and committed. Thus, institutionally speaking, despite some consistency, discourses show some considerable inconsistencies. However, all EU produced documents, irrespective of institutions, use a variety of discursive tools to create an appearance of consistency, an important tool returned to later.

Consistency Across Time

For measuring this type, annual Commission reports were analysed. Indeed, the very nature of this data reproduces the idea of consistency, in the way they are published annually, are structured in a similar way and make use of similar discourses year on year. Certain discourses are even republished word for word, making it hard to argue, from a discursive point of view at least, the EU has been anything but consistent.

However, not only does the EU give an *impression* of consistency (a finding discussed later), but it also *is* consistent in terms of the discourses it produces yearly. Some examples of discourse strands remaining consistent across time are: that the judiciary has remained independent; the media free; that corruption is rare; that freedom of speech and association have continued; that HK people want, and are ready for, democracy; and that the continuation of One Country, Two Systems means HK remains stable and prosperous.

One way the discourse can be seen to have gradually evolved across all institutions, as a reflection of changing circumstances, is that universal suffrage becomes more strongly defended over time. Whereas in the early years after the handover, the discourse was just that universal suffrage is supported by the EU, this has changed to saying universal suffrage should be encouraged because it is beneficial for various reasons. In latter documents, the EU also has become more likely to make specific reference to alarming events and more openly to acknowledge that one Country, Two Systems is having more pressure put on it.

A further example of discourse in flux is in terms of the level of optimism. The annual reports up to 2003 were optimistic in tone. This changed in 2004 as a result of the Article 23 event. But optimism levels rose again after this and remained positive until

2014 when the Umbrella Movement occurred, becoming even more negative in 2015 and remaining so to the present.

A shift in discourse from 2014

The 2014 report showed a notable alteration in discourse, a result of the 2014 Occupy Protests. One example of discourse shift was, for the first time in a report, indeed in any documents across the institutions, HK and the EU's relationship was discussed in political terms. The otherwise very consistent norm was for their relationship to predominantly be discussed in terms of economics, people-to-people exchange and trade.

Throughout the report, there are discourse strands introduced that have not appeared before, such as the acknowledgement One Country, Two Systems is facing challenges. In general, this report's discourse has more explicit language, the EU really spelling out why universal suffrage is necessary for HK and that the EU is more supportive of One Country, Two Systems than ever before.

An important new discourse strand to appear was more concrete commitment by the EU to cooperate on issues relating to electoral reform. The EU goes as far as to offer sharing their practical experience in democratic development, a step forward in commitment from the usual declaratory statements. Previously, cooperation had never been discussed in terms of this policy area. The report was also longer, providing more space to issues related to democratic norms.

Even a year after the protests, the EU's tone remained more negative due to the disappearance of five booksellers, with more new discourses emerging in the 2015 report. These included: that the EU regrets the lack of progress; that the functioning of One Country, Two Systems was for the first time called into "serious doubt". It is also the first report in which the Commission calls on the Chinese and HK government to act. In this sense, the critical tone taken echoes the discourses of the Parliament. In general, the report's wording was more pessimistic and critical than previous years.

The changing discourse continued to develop in 2016, with the addition for the first time in the report early on of not only reference to several worrying events but also to people's anxiety at the prospect of 2047 approaching. Yet, immediately after this, the consistent discourses return - that despite certain challenges and issues, freedoms remain and One Country, Two Systems continues.

In the most recent report, more new discourses emerged, most notably the acknowledgement that a gradual erosion of freedoms in HK has caused "legitimate

questions” to be raised about HK's long term autonomy. Also, freedom of the press was called more into question this year, self-censorship being discussed in-depth.

However, despite these differences in the 2014, 2015 and 2016 reports' discourse, the EU *still* presents the same overall positive discourse that One Country, Two Systems is working fine and that many freedoms have continued to be well exercised. This proves high levels of discursive consistency across time, as even the most significant political event in HK's history could not change the EU's fundamental discursive message. There were more discursive strands that consistently reappeared yearly than new strands that came and went.

To conclude, discourse across time has been remarkably consistent, with the continued reproduction of various discourses over the last two decades. Even when events occurred that arguably threatened the political and legal status quo, both the optimism about One Country, Two Systems' health and other discursive strands continued. Furthermore, much of the inconsistency seen in discourse across time is purely a response to an evolving political situation. In this sense, it would be a criticism towards the EU if their discourse *didn't* change whilst the environment in HK did. Thus, discourse not remaining entirely uniform across time is not necessarily a negative finding.

Consistency Across Time And Institutions

A common tendency in discourse across both elements is for the EU to promote the same values in every document, including the rule of law, freedoms, universal suffrage and the preservation of One Country, Two Systems. This is done to enact an identity the EU sees itself as having - that of a normative power.

Furthermore, similar discourse strands appear together and overlapping, notably the preservation of One Country Two Systems being an insurer of the preservation of key freedoms and values; that the EU cares, is concerned about and takes an interest in HK's situation; that dialogue between both the EU and HK and HK and China, is an effective tool to achieve progress; that the EU is an important actor in HK; that the EU and HK share common values; and that HK has great strategic importance for EU interests. This is so much the case that often entire paragraphs are copied from one resolution or report to the next.

This is reinforced by consistent use throughout all documents, debates and speeches of intertextuality, a common technique found in EU discourse, which helps the discourse appear consistent and uniform. There are numerous other examples of intertextuality, such as reference by other institutions in speeches or press releases to the

annual report, and continual reference in the annual report and in EEAS documents to high level visits. All these examples are significant to answering the question of consistency as intertextuality is an important way the EU maintains consistent discourses across long time periods.

In addition, consistency across both time and institutions has occurred in how the EU is adept at using discourse to create the *impression* it has always called for the same thing, supported the same goals. For example, using words such as “recall”, “continues”, “remains”, “always”, “reaffirmation”, “repeatedly”. Almost every time an EU pledge of support is made, or their relationship with HK is referenced, such words precede this to underline their consistent position. The EU also sees its own approach to HK as consistent over time, calling itself so in the reports.

A further example of consistency across time and institutions is in terms of how HK is perceived by the EU and the identity attributed to it. Examples of descriptions that reappear include: “unique”, “dynamic”, “diverse”, “free”, a “gateway”, having a “strategically favourable position in Asia”; “regional hub” and as a “key partner”. The various descriptions indicate a consistent attitude towards HK, perceiving it as having two main identity strands: strategic importance and uniqueness. A final example is in the repetition of discourses portraying the EU’s relationship with HK as continuously deepening and widening. At no point in time, in any institution, have their relations been discussed in a negative way.

In conclusion, there are large levels of consistency across both time and institutions. This trend continues when consistency between actions and words is examined.

Consistency In Word And Deed

In the Commission’s Communication published just before the handover, they pledged to do three things: 1. To deal directly with the HK government as an international partner and maintain regular and close contacts. 2. To closely monitor the situation in HK and the respect for rights guaranteed to citizens, bringing EU instruments into play if necessary. 3. To put active cooperation between the two on a more permanent footing. Whether each pledge has been fulfilled is discussed in turn.

The EU has to a strong extent fulfilled the first. This can be seen by how the pledge made at the same time to conduct high level visits between the EU and HK has continuously been fulfilled, the number of visits actually increasing in number and level of seniority year on year. Further evidence is the setting up, from 2006 onwards, of an

annual Structured Dialogue between the EU and HK. This happened only a year after a visit to HK from President Barroso where it was agreed such a dialogue was needed, showing swift action on discussed recommendations.

With regards to the second pledge, the first element (to closely monitor the situation) has been fully complied with. The EU has consistently been a keen observer of HK's development, evidenced for example by the reliable, detailed explanations of the political situation or of specific important events in the annual reports. Both Commission and Parliament discourses show evidence of being attuned to the HK context, providing great depth and technical details. The EU is well aware of HK people's concerns and desires. An illustrative example is in how the Commission mentions Occupy Central as an example of the emerging groups calling for democracy in the 2013 report *before* the movement became particularly well known or the protests occur a year later.

Regarding the second promise, often in an annual report a particularly worrying development is explained in detail, ending with a line saying the EU will monitor this situation closely. Virtually every time this happens, there is then a section on updates in this area in the following report(s). One example of inconsistency is that, sometimes when an important development occurs, the EU will make a statement or action on it immediately, yet in other instances they will discuss it in hindsight. The EU does not always react with the same speed or vigilance.

The second element of the second pledge, concerning the use of all available EU instruments, has been achieved. Evidence for this commitment being fulfilled is that each year, there are annual reports produced that demonstrate the EU is keeping a close eye on the political and legal situation in the region. Further evidence is that, when significant events occur, all four institutions respond. For example, during the Article 23 saga in 2003 and the Occupy protests in 2014, the EEAS released statements, the Council released declarations, the Parliament debated and the Commission gave sizeable space in their annual report to the issue.

Further evidence for the EU sticking to its promise to monitor the situation is in the Parliament's resolution on HK published before the handover, they called for the existing EU delegation office in HK to have its staff and resources increased. Over the last twenty years, this has happened, with the span of their work increasing annually. Are all instruments made use of? A wide range are, including dialogues, resolutions, communications, debates, communiques, high level meetings, diplomatic missions and cooperation.

One example of EU inconsistency is that the 1997 Commission communication promised not only to produce annual reports but also that the Parliament would publish resolutions biannually on the contents of these. Although this was carried out until 2004, no resolutions have been published since. In addition, following their pledge in 2014 to offer more cooperation and support in democratic reform, it is unclear whether the Commission has offered this over the past four years. There is little mention of it in the future reports, and the situation in HK regarding electoral reform progress has remained stagnant.

Concerning the third commitment, this has been fully achieved. Just some examples of cooperation include: in culture, research, trade and many more. The annual reports getting longer every year rudimentarily demonstrates cooperation has expanded. Simply reading each annual report provides ample evidence the pledge to cooperate with HK has been fulfilled. In addition, a specific area of cooperation pledged by the Commission from 1997 was for contact and cooperation between the Parliament and the LegCo to increase. This has indeed happened, with two or three visits per year by MEPs from the EU-China delegation and vice versa. Arguably, the EU could have gone further by creating a specific parliamentary delegation to HK.

To conclude, in consistency between words and actions, the EU in fact scores highly.

CONCLUSION

The preceding research aimed to show whether, despite pressures originating from other actors, the EU could remain consistent in its foreign policy approach towards the HKSAR. To achieve this, the question *How consistent is the EU in promoting democratic norms in its relations with the HKSAR?* was asked. The answer reached, after undertaking an extensive discourse analysis, is that the EU has, over the last two decades, in fact demonstrated a high level of uniformity in its action towards HK, in terms of both talk and action.

As the above analysis revealed, the EU has demonstrated a considerable amount of consistency in foreign policy towards HK and their democratisation process. This research attempted to uncover whether the consistency of the EU's foreign policy approach may have been affected as a result of the wider context of EU-China relations. It appears this is largely not the case.

In terms of consistency across time, the EU has remained mostly consistent, any discursive fluctuation justified by the fact this is to be somewhat expected as a situation changes. In institutional terms there has been consistency, with the marked exception of

a stronger discourse originating from the Parliament, as indeed literature predicts. Discursive consistency is also seen when both time and institutions are analysed together. Finally, the EU scores highly in terms of following through its words with actions. These findings reveal that perhaps there is potential for the EU to pursue a consistent and coherent foreign policy towards China, and that, despite pessimism in the wider literature, all is not lost. The EU can manage to balance interests and values.

The conclusions drawn can contribute to making conclusions and connections to the wider puzzle of EU-China relations, a field of research that definitely gives future research inspiration. Furthermore, the analysis revealed relevant findings about the EU's interests regarding HK, its perceptions of HK, and how various discourses draw on and reinforce others to build and create perceptions. Due to time and space constraints, these could not be included. When considering EU interests, is the question of preserving HK's political autonomy and thus its economic vitality of more pressing concern than the need to keep the EU in China's good books? This would make for interesting future research.

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