

# Contemporary Political Relations between Europe and Japan: Beyond the Weak Link Approach

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**Abstract:** The aim of this working paper is threefold: firstly, to provide an overview of Japan-EU's relationship, particularly regarding political and security issues; secondly, to explain the possible changes in the nature of the relationship in the post-cold war period; and finally, to better grasp the meaning and functions of EU-Japan's relations, through an interregional approach.

**Keywords:** Japan-EU relationship; interregionalism; human security; civil power; comprehensive security.

## Introduction

At the last EU-Japan Summit, Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, Mr Jose Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, and Naoto Kan, then Prime Minister of Japan held a joint press conference to reaffirm the close partnership between the European Union and Japan as global partners and major economies, and celebrated the 20th anniversary of summits between the two sides. At the joint conference the parties reiterated a shared commitment to fundamental values and principles, including democracy, the rule of law and human rights, as well as to a market-based economy and sustainable development, and the common global challenge they face.

Beyond the declaration, evidence bears out a truism: Europe and Japan are two of the most important actors in the international system. They have a combined population of 620 million (10% of the world's population) and a nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that represents 40% of world GDP. In 2010 exports to Japan reached €44 billion (3.2% of total EU exports) and the EU was ranked 3rd in Japan's imports (11.1%) and exports (13.3%). In addition, Japan is the EU's sixth largest export market (after the United States, Switzerland, China, Russia and Turkey). Moreover, Japan's imports into the EU reached €65 billion, Japan being the sixth largest source of imports into the EU (after China, the United States, Russia, Switzerland and Norway).

Although both parties share their nature of economic superpowers and a common understanding of how an international system should be, how can the relationship between the EU and Japan in the new millennium be described? Do they have a strong relationship or are they still the missing link in a triangle consisting of Europe, East Asia and North America? Beyond the rhetoric of "global partners" repeated at summit after summit, what is the nature of their relationship: political, economical or cultural?

## 1. Historical overview

### EU-Japan relations during the cold war

Following the end of the Second World War, Japan and Europe were both concentrated on economic recovery, and their political and economical relation was rather limited. After a period of mutual distrust due to the memories of atrocities perpetrated by the Japanese in European colonies, both parties officially reconciled

following the reparations stipulated in the San Francisco Peace Treaty (1951).<sup>1</sup>

After the construction of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, Japan was distrustful of the consequences that a customs union could have on Japan's exports with the region. In contrast, considering that Japan was accepted as a member of the World Bank in 1952, at the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) in 1955, and as a member of the International Monetary Fund in 1964, the Europeans were worried that Japanese products could dump on the market. The EEC countries began to observe the Japanese economic miracle with anxiety as soon as Japanese products, much cheaper but of high quality, turned the country into a global competitive trading power. One of the episodes that best illustrates Anti-Japanese feeling among Europeans was held during the visit that the Prime Minister Ikeda Iyato paid to Europe in 1962. After his meeting with the Prime Minister, French President Charles de Gaulle referred to Ikeda as "ce petit marchand de transistors" (Lehmann, 1992: 128 in Mykal 2011, 48).

Although in the 50s-60s Japan and Europe were mainly focused on issues of an economic and trade nature, a first attempt to establish a political dialogue was proposed by Ikeda's "three-pillar theory". According to the Prime Minister, it was necessary to create an alliance of Western Europe, Japan and North America in order to assure a free and open economic order. Despite the fact that it has been the foundation of the Trilateral Commission created in the 70s, at that time its counterparts did not follow the initiative. The United States preferred a Japan that strictly pursued its pro-American foreign policy and the Europeans did not have enough competence with regard to external action, which still depended fully on the member states (Mykal 2011, 48). Despite the fact that in 1959 Japan's Ambassador to Belgium was accredited as Japan's Representative to the European Communities, European-Japanese political dialogue until the 70s was carried out through bilateral foreign ministerial meetings between Japan and the UK, France West Germany and Italy.

As a result of Japan's increasing exportation of cars, electronics and machinery to Western Europe, 1969 represented a turning point in Europe-Japan relations. For the first time, the EEC announced a trade deficit with Japan of \$147 million. By 1973 the EEC trade deficit with Japan reached a dramatic \$1 billion (Togo 2005, 265). In addition to this, the "Nixon shocks" of 1971 and the oil crisis of 1972 prompted Japan to review its dependence on the US. Therefore, a boom in foreign direct investment (FDI) between 1971 and 1973 (from \$20 million in 1971 to \$113 million in 1972) disturbed European industries. Hook et al. (2012, 276-277) observes that European industries lobbied the Japanese government and the *Nippon Keidanren* (Japanese Business Association) to introduce voluntary export restraints (VERs). In front of a delegation of the *Keidanren* in 1976, the then President of the European Commission François-Xavier Ortoli raised concerns about the increasing trade deficits with the following words:

[T]he EC countries were extremely annoyed by Japanese export offensives and the substantial increase of trade deficits [...] If current trade deficits were to continue between Japan and Europe, Japan would face grave consequences. (Hosoya 1993 in Togo 2005, 265)

As a consequence of this concern in Europe, the Japanese government launched a series of measures to solve trade disputes such as VER agreement in the automobile sector or the Japanese consideration to increase EEC imports to Japan. In addition to this, Tokyo established a representative office in Brussels to deal with these issues. However, despite the Japanese government's willingness to solve the problem, by 1981 the EEC deficit with Japan reached \$10 billion. As Togo (2005, 266) points out, the Japanese attempt to

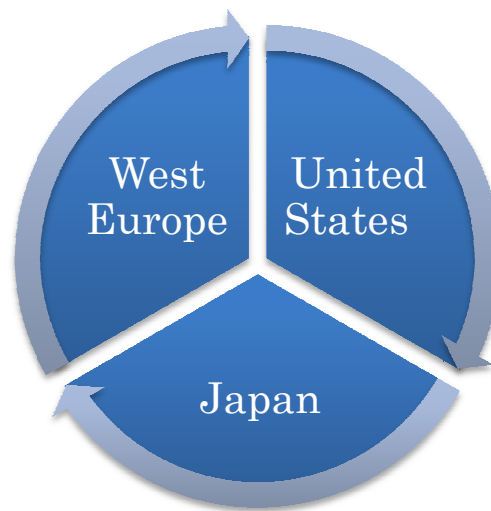
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<sup>1</sup> According to the peace treaty, some reparations were paid by Japan to the International Committee of the Red Cross and Netherlands (Togo, 2005, 262).

solve trade tensions at the end of the 1970s was “short-lived”, and countries such as the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg forced a VER on Japan. Additionally, Italy and France introduced import restrictions.

Regardless of trade tensions, in the political realm, the EEC and Japan initiated high level talks on an annual basis. In 1984 both parties decided to institutionalise annual EEC-Japan ministerial conferences (normally MOFA and MITI) and the EEC presidency to discuss issues of mutual interest. Nakasone's administration went even further and in 1983 suggested the establishment of a forum between Japan and NATO countries to talk about defence issues. As stated by Mykal (2011, 56) the proposal contained the main aspects of Ikeda's “three-pillar concept”. Although France finally rejected the proposal, it does reveal that both parties were not only interested in economic issues. Berkofsky (2007, 19) reminds us that by the end of 1980s, leaders of both regions began to intensify their political relationship and to embrace the idea of “trilateralism”.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 1. Ikeda's three-pillar theory



## 2. Japan and the EU as new global actors: a new era of cooperation

At the beginning of the 1990s, the period of trade disputes between Europe and Japan was replaced by a new era of cooperation not only in the economic realm but also in a wide range of areas such as diplomacy, politics, security, the environment and cultural exchanges. However, what were the driving forces behind this change?

As suggested in a previous work (López i Vidal 2008, 32), in the early 1990s two events had a significant effect on the configuration of the new international order: the fall of the communist bloc and the creation of an increasingly interconnected global economy. Regarding the political situation, the end of the bipolar order had a major impact on both actors. On the one hand, although the bilateral relationship with the United States continued to be the cornerstone of its foreign policy, Japan started to build a more independent identity on the world stage. As a result of its “chequebook diplomacy” in the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991), Japan reformulated its security policy in order to better contribute to the international community. On the other hand, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent reunification of Germany, the dissolution of the

<sup>2</sup> For a further reading on Trilateralism see: Owada, Hisashi. 1980. «Trilateralism: A Japanese Perspective». *International Security* 5(3): 14-24.

USSR and the beginning of regional and international crisis (Persian Gulf and former Yugoslavia) forced Europe to rethink its security framework and its external relations. As stated by Togo (2005, 269):

“Japan and Europe were embarked on a new voyage in uncharted waters, with Japan and Europe appearing as two regions with their common values of democracy, market economy and peace binding them close together”.

Regarding the economic situation, the acceleration of economic interdependence and the phenomenon of globalisation<sup>3</sup> generated a period of relative euphoria regarding the benefits of international cooperation. The enlargement to the north and the east turned Europe into a vast regional market and a major global economic actor that Japan could not ignore, particularly as Japan had already entered into a period of economic stagnation.

In addition to the international changes of economic and political order, institutional factors had a significant impact on the Europe-Japan relationship. Considering the limits of the European Political Cooperation, besides formally establishing the European Union (EU) the Maastricht Treaty (1992) incorporated a three-pillar system and established a common foreign and security policy.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Amsterdam Treaty added a new mechanism to strengthen the political visibility of Europe as a political actor: the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy set up in order to coordinate the EU's foreign policy. The deepening of EU's institutional structure and its subsequent enlargement made it impossible for Japan or any other actor to ignore the potential of the region (Hook et. al. 2012, 264).

## The 1991 Hague Declaration

All these factors indicated the need for greater economic, political and security cooperation between Europe and Japan. As suggested by Mykel (2011, 68-69), both actors had to rethink their policies in accordance with their new status as economic superpowers with a responsibility to provide economic and political leadership. As a result, by 1991 at the first Japan-European Summit in The Hague between Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki, the President of the European Council Jacques R. Delors and the Prime Minister R.F.M Lubbers of the Netherlands acting as President of the European Council signed a Joint Declaration on relations between the EC and its Member States and Japan.<sup>5</sup> The Hague Declaration, as it is generally known, was the first document to highlight the need for dialogue and cooperation on a broad number of issues in order to jointly face the challenge that an uncertain world could pose.

The preamble of the Declaration states that both actors share a particular attachment to freedom, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, market principles and the promotion of free trade, all of which enable a prosperous world economy. The document established not only the need for economic cooperation, but also, for the first time, it set up joint political objectives: a mutual desire for global stability based on shared principles of freedom, democracy, rule of law and market economy. In addition to this, the Joint

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<sup>3</sup> When talking about globalisation, it is crucial to distinguish between the phenomenon as a trend and as a type of a political project. While the globalisation can be used as a “catch-all concept” to describe the process of internationalization and liberalisation among economies, it also depicts a political project that promotes certain policies which imply a certain degree of convergence towards values and patterns that are mainly characteristic of western culture.

<sup>4</sup> This was a result of the so called “spillover effect” According to neofunctionalists, “spillover effect” is the name given to the contagion-type mechanism by which economic integration leads to political integration.

<sup>5</sup> See the document at «Joint Declaration on Relations between the European Community and its Member States and Japan The Hague». 1991. [http://eeas.europa.eu/japan/docs/joint\\_pol\\_decl\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/japan/docs/joint_pol_decl_en.pdf) (last visit: 17th January 2012).

Declaration established a framework for dialogue and consultations through an annual summit between the Japanese government, the president of the European Council and the President of the Commission.<sup>6</sup>

Whilst some authors cast doubt on the real impact of The Hague Declaration on its overall relationship, the document has been a starting point from which to develop political relations with a more powerful Europe, and a way to enhance Japan's position as a responsible stakeholder on the world stage. Since then, the EU and the Japanese government has started consultations and discussions on several issues such as the environment (EC-Japan, 1992), trade imbalance and investment policy (EC-Japan, 1992), conventional arms transfers within the UN structure (EC-Japan Summit, 1992), anti-personnel landmines (EU-Japan Summit 1994), North Korea's nuclear issue (KEDO, 1996), or the launching of a new interregional body in which to discuss issues of mutual interest (ASEM, 1996).<sup>7</sup>

## 2001 Action Plan for EU-Japan Cooperation

A decade later, in 2001 the majority of the previous conflicts between the EU and Japan had vanished. Romano Prodi, acting as President of the European Commission, presented a lecture in Tokyo at the *Keidanren* in which he highlighted the fact that Japan and the EU shared common interests and therefore an enhanced global partnership between both actors was necessary. Aware that The Hague Declaration was criticised for being a mere codification of consultation mechanisms, Prodi affirmed that the task ahead was to translate common values into joint action. Similarly, at the Ninth EU-Japan Summit (2000), the parties agreed to start a "decade of Japan-Europe Cooperation".<sup>8</sup> As stressed by the official document of the meeting, there had to be three main pillars of cooperation: a) strengthening of Japan-Europe political cooperation on issues such as arms control, non-proliferation or reform of the United Nations; b) sharing an attachment to peace, freedom, democracy, rule of law and human rights; and c) sharing the benefits of globalization.

Finally, in 2001, and only two months after 11S, the EU and Japan decided to adopt the "Joint Action Plan for EU-Japan Cooperation", a key official instrument with concise action aimed at achieving the goals stated by The Hague Declaration. After reiterating that the parties converged on a range of global and regional issues such as the promotion of peace and stability, the fight against terrorism or the promotion of social cohesion, the document stipulated four main objectives: a) promotion of peace and security at a multilateral level, b) strengthening the economic and trade partnership, c) coping with global and societal challenges such as an ageing society or gender equality, and finally d) bringing people and cultures together.

In total, the document names more than 100 possible actions for bilateral cooperation in the period from 2001 until 2010. As one specialist on EU-Japan relationship's stated, the document covered so many issues facing today's globalised world that it has been criticised for being a mere "shopping" list of unresolved issues (Berkofsky 2007,10). In other words, the 2001 Action Plan is an ambitious document of 21 areas in which the EU and Japan sought to enhance their relationship but have produced few tangible results or joint actions.

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<sup>6</sup> The document consolidated existing meetings and consultations and introduced new initiatives. As stated by the document, both parties will strengthen their mechanism for consultation and cooperation on global and bilateral: a) holding annual consultation between the President of the European Council and the President of the Commission and the Japanese Prime Minister; a) annual meeting between the Commission and the Japanese Government at ministerial level (as was already launched since 1984) c) six-monthly consultation between the Foreign ministers of the Community and the Member of the Commission responsible for external relations (troika) and the Japanese Foreign.

<sup>7</sup> Other consultations were the High level Forum in Science and Technology (1993), a Deregulation dialogue (1994), Centre of Industrial Commission (1995), Science Technology Higher education (1997), or Regulatory reform (1999).

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/eu/summit/joint0007.html> (last visit: 17th January 2012)

Nevertheless, contrary to what some scholars suggest, from 2001 the EU and Japan started to broaden cooperation on security and have undertaken several joint initiatives and bilateral fora to deal with security issues. Among them, we have identified the following actions:

- Joint promotion of the reform of the Conventional Weapon Protocol on anti-personnel landmines.
- Supporting the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.
- Adherence to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and complementation of its principles.
- Promotion of the Ottawa Convention (1997) on the abolition of anti-personnel landmines.
- Redoubling of efforts to jointly support the Republic of Korea's engagement policy (2001) through the Korean Energy Development Organization (KEDO).
- Support of the International Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (2002).
- Engagement in joint peacekeeping and peace building initiatives.
- Launch of joint seminars on post conflict nation-building in several countries (Afghanistan, Cambodia).
- Engagement in periodic consultations on terrorism and counter-terrorism cooperation (2002).
- Exchange of information on North Korea considering Japan's participation at the Six Party Talks (2003)
- Co-chairing of the Ministerial Conference on Peace Consolidation and Economic Development of the West Balkans in Tokyo (2004).
- Signing of the Joint Declaration on Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (2005).
- Launch of an EU-Japan Strategic Dialogue on Central Asia (2006).
- Launch of a joint "strategic dialogue on East Asia's security environment" on security issues such as the lifting of the EU arms embargo.

### 3. EU-Japan cooperation on security: limits and achievements of two civilian powers

As Reiterer (2006) has suggested, the EU-Japan cooperation on security fits well with one of the central tenets of Japanese and European foreign policy: the promotion of its "civilian power" and the human security doctrine. Although Japan and the EU have not renounced military force as a means of facing the multiple threats that the new international system poses for both countries, first the Persian Gulf War and then war in Yugoslavia have proved the limits to using military force in regional and global crises. As a result, they have both adopted a comprehensive approach that includes military and also civilian actions.

Since the end of the 1990s, Japan has embraced the concept of human security<sup>9</sup> as one element of its foreign policy. In May 1998 Prime Minister Obuchi declared that, along with the Japan-U.S Security Arrangements and its own defence capability, Japan had incorporated human security<sup>10</sup> into its diplomacy as a way of ensuring peace and stability. By 1999, for the first time Japan introduced the concept of human security into the Diplomatic Bluebook (*Gaikou seisho*), an annual report on foreign policy. After the revision of Japan's Official Development Assistance Charter, the concept of human security became one of the basic

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<sup>9</sup> See Kofi Annan. "Secretary-General Salutes International Workshop on Human Security in Mongolia." Two-Day Session in Ulaanbaatar, May 8-10, 2000. Press Release SG/SM/7382.

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2000/20000508.sgs7382.doc.html> (last visit: 17th January 2012)

<sup>10</sup> The definition "human security is based on the idea that all citizens have the right to live in peace and security within their own border. Thus, it covers human rights, good governance, access to education and health care and ensuring that each person has opportunities to fulfill his potential. As Kofi Annan stressed: "Every step in this direction is also a step towards reducing poverty, achieving economic growth and preventing conflict. Freedom from want, freedom from fear, and the freedom of future generations to inherit a healthy natural environment".

policies on the Official Development Aid.

Regarding European conceptualization of human security, in 2003 the EU adopted European Security Strategy (ESS), a basic document that highlights the promotion of peace, the rule of law and development as core elements of the security of its citizens. In addition, as pointed out by Kaldor and Glasius (2005),<sup>11</sup> the three reasons for the EU to adopt the concept are morality, legality (the EU seeks to implement the concept through self-binding to the legal framework) and self-interest.

Consequently, both parties incorporated a human security dimension in their security doctrine, a dimension that is consistent with their willingness to become a civilian power. At the 2004 EU-Japan Summit, both parties established a “partnership” to achieve their common objectives of disarmament and non-proliferation, and called for cooperation. According to most specialists on the issue, considering that they both contemplated development aid and crisis management as economic mechanisms not only to assist developing countries but also to provide security to the region, the EU- Japan development dialogue has been securitised.

Furthermore, they started a dialogue on development aid and crisis management as tools for providing human security. In 2001, they cooperated on Africa to support initiatives from African regional organizations to prevent and resolve conflicts. On the Asian continent, the EU and Japan both co-chaired the Tokyo Conference on the Reconstruction and Development of Sri Lanka (2003) and provided \$4.5 billion in aid from 2003-2006 (Mykel 2001, 172). Regarding joint involvement in crisis management,<sup>12</sup> although their joint efforts date back to the 1990s (Cambodia Middle East and North Korea), in the new millennium the EU and Japan have cooperated on the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe<sup>13</sup> to help the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, have supported East Timor independence (EU-Japan Summit 2001) and have participated and coordinated within the Afghan Reconstruction Steering Group through reconstruction activities.

#### 4. Interregionalism: a recalibration of Japan-EU’s relationship analysis

In spite of the fact that Japan and the EU have been engaged in dialogue and joint projects and actions since the end of the Cold War as part of their “civilian power” identity”, there is an obvious lack of visibility. Some authors go even further and assess that there is a “lack of seriousness” in the Japan-EU relationship (Hook et. al 2012, 258). Others assert that although Tokyo and Brussels have highly ambitious plans regarding economic and political cooperation, there is a lack of political will to “do more” in areas of foreign and security affairs (Berkofsky 2007).

Contrary to what is generally assumed, we do not share this gloomy vision. In our view, there is a need to recalibrate the relationship between Japan and the EU and to consider the relationship, not on a country-to-country basis, but with a new analytical approach. The Japan-EU relationship has been treated in the literature simply as a relationship between two actors of the international system, without taking into account that this is not a “normal” bilateral relationship. However, what is the nature of their relationship? Is it a pure interregional relationship? What are the implications?

In a previous work, we have pointed out the confusion when dealing with the subject of interregional

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<sup>11</sup> For further reading see M. Glasius and M. Kaldor, “Individuals First: A Human Security Strategy for the European Union”, *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, 2005, pp. 62-82.

<sup>12</sup> Crisis management refers to humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping and conflict preventions operations.

<sup>13</sup> The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe was an institution focused on strengthening peace, democracy and human rights in some countries of South Eastern Europe that existed from 1999 until 2008. By 2008 the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe was replaced by the Regional Cooperation Council.

relationships, and the difficulty of elaborating a list that encompasses the vast array of all varieties of the phenomenon (López i Vidal 2007). In a detailed study Hänggi, Roloff and Rüländ (2006) identifies five types of interregional relations: relations between the members of two consolidated regional organization (ASEAN-EU or EU-Rio Group); relations between a more or less institutionalised regional organization and a group of states (ASEM); two regional groups, neither of which is represented by a regional organization (FEALAC); states, groups of states and regional organizations from two or more regions (APEC); and finally, an international organization or regional group and a third state, the EU-Japan being a classic example. Although some actors consider it a bilateral interregionalism relationship (Oudjani 2004 342), and Hänggi (2000) considers it a “quasi-interregional” relation, we affirm that we should consider it in the broader sense of interregional relations.

Figure 2. Types of interregionalism

Type	Region A	Region B	Examples
1	Regional organisation	Regional organisation	EU-ASEAN ASEAN-Mercosur
2	Regional organisation	Regional group	ASEM Africa-Europe
3	Regional group	Regional group	FEALAC
4	Group of states from two or more regions		APEC ARF
5	Regional organisation/Regional group		ASEAN-Japan EU-Japan

Once we have classified it as an interregional relationship, what are the most important functions of interregionalism for both parties? What are the implications for the relationship? Of the various functions highlighted in the literature, at least four are worth mentioning here (López i Vidal 2008).

Firstly, interregional fora can act as mechanisms for balancing power in the sense that they can support or change the balance of power. As suggested by Maull and Okfen (2003), rather than balancing through military force, interregionalism achieves a sort of “institutional balance” in which coalitions of regional actors take action in response to the agenda of the moment. In this sense, although some authors saw the EU-Japan relationship at the beginning of the 1990’s as a counterbalance to the United States or to APEC because it offered both parties a tool to diversify and not become over-dependent on the United States (Park 2006 in Reiterer 2006), as already pointed out, the interregional dialogue is only complementary to the security cooperation with the United States.

Secondly, interregionalism can act as bandwagoning, that is, a country can align with the strongest actor or with a winning coalition. There was certainly a function of bandwagoning in the early nineties. Japan wanted to avoid being left behind the European "locomotive" and did not wish to be excluded from the European fortress. Meanwhile, Europe was aware of the rise of Asia-Pacific in the international economic system. However, bandwagoning has declined in importance, especially if we consider the gradual decline of Japan as an economic power and the economic and political crisis experienced by Europe since 2009.

Thirdly, there is an institution-building function in interregionalism that cannot be ignored. As we have seen, the interregional relationship since the 1990s has led to an institutionalization process between



Japan and the EU. Although they follow what many theorists call “soft institutional mechanism”, in recent years the framework for Japan- EU dialogues has broadened considerably and it is comprised of the following mechanisms: Japan-EU Summit, Japan-EU Foreign Minister Meeting, Japan-EU Political Directors’ Meeting, Japan-EU Working Groups<sup>14</sup>, Japan-EU Strategic Dialogue<sup>15</sup>, Japan-EU High Level Consultation on Economy<sup>16</sup> and the Senior Officials Meeting.

Finally, interregional fora have a rationalizing effect, acting as “clearing houses”. In other words, it is possible for the parties to reach a pre-agreement on several issues and subsequently to participate in multilateral negotiations with a common position. In this sense, interregionalism serves to set an agenda for discussion in other multilateral fora. As we pointed out (López i Vidal 2008, 51-52), interregional fora can reduce the “bottleneck effect” in multilateral negotiations by allowing parties to discuss their interests beforehand. Japan and the EU have begun to create important networks and coalitions in the 1990s in several fora such as the United Nations, the OECD, KEDO, ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference, ASEAN Regional Forum or ASEM. As suggested by Hook et al. (2012, 273) the aforementioned fora “provide additional formal channels thorough which Japanese policy-makers become acquainted with their European counterparts and further strengthen their voice in international affairs”.

In this sense, the EU-Japan relationship serves to discuss a number of specific issues (trade policy, economic/financial policy, energy, science and technology, regulatory reform, United Nations reform, etc.) that has to be treated in multilateral fora. Using DENT’s (2004) terminology, the EU-Japan’s relationship serves as a multilateral deference<sup>17</sup> since they allow “pre-discussion of agenda items for forthcoming global-multilateral negotiations. Consequently, Japan-EU interest, as in the ASEM case, lies in its function as a “minilateral forum” (Gilson 2005),

## 5. Conclusions

To sum up, after the post-war reconciliation, Japan and Europe were mostly concentrated on economic relations and their political dialogue was rather limited. As soon as Japanese exportations in Europe produced the first trade deficits, fierce trade disputes between both parties arose. In the political realm, in 1984 both parties decided to institutionalise their political dialogue through ministerial conferences. Following the end of communism, the period of trade disputes was replaced by a new era of cooperation, and Europe and Japan started to rethink their policies in line with their new international status. In short, first the Hague Declaration (1991) and later the Action Plan reveals an increasing interest in collaboration under a new paradigm or approach. What are the main characteristics of Japanese-European relationship in the new millennium?

Firstly, since they share the same values (democracy, free market and defence of human rights) and political objectives (a mutual desire for global stability), Japan and the EU have increasingly strengthened their mechanisms of dialogue and started working together on issues of mutual interest. However, beyond this rhetoric, there is not a clear or common foreign policy strategy. Their relationship is not “future-oriented” or “preventive”; rather, it is based on the ability to address issues with a reactive and pragmatic approach.

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<sup>14</sup> There are currently eight groups: Asia; Russia, Disarmament and Non Proliferation; Human rights: Middle East; Western Balkans; Africa and the UN

<sup>15</sup> In this dialogue there are two main groups: Strategic Dialogue on Central Asia and Strategic Dialogue on East Asian Security Environment.

<sup>16</sup> This level of consultation entails different dialogues such as Japan-EU High Level Meeting on the Environment; Japan-EU Dialogue on Intellectual Property Rights or Japan-EU Regulatory Reform Dialogue.

<sup>17</sup> To read about the concept see: Dent, Christopher M. 2004. «The Asia-Europe Meeting and Inter- regionalism: Toward a Theory of Multilateral Utility». *Asian Survey* 44(2): 213-236.

Secondly, Japan and the EU have been broadening their security dialogue in the post- cold war era and they have collaborated on issues related with their comprehensive security approach, such as crisis management, development aid, environmental issues and nuclear non-proliferation. Consequently, both parties assume that in order to serve their national and regional security effectively, they have to combine “soft power” policies (such as human security), along with their “hard power” alliance with the United States (Berkofsky 2008, 13). In other words, non-military dialogue and joint cooperation are seen in Brussels and Tokyo as complementary to Tokyo’s security cooperation with the United States and EU alliance with the United States through NATO.

Thirdly, we subscribe to the idea commonly accepted among scholars that there is a serious lack of visibility of the EU-Japan political dialogue because neither parties have significant disputes. There is a shared belief that the “lack of problems” creates a problem. As Berkofsky noted, the problem of EU-Japan relations is that they do not “grab the head-lines” (Berkofsky in Mykel 2011:124). In other words, even if there is an increasing amount of dialogue or joint activity on several issues, it appears to be invisible to the media.

Finally, there is a need to tackle EU-Japan’s relations in terms of a new analytical framework. It is not an ordinary state-to-state forum. Rather, it is an interregional relation whose function is primarily twofold: to foster institution-building in a multi- layered system of global governance and to act as rationalisers or “clearing-houses” that enable both parties to reach pre-agreements on different issues (the so called “multilateral deference”. Only if we apply an interregionalism approach to the study of the EU and Japan will we be able to grasp the meaning and functions of this bilateral relationship.

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