

Editors' introduction to the Special Issue

New opportunities for the EU-Canada Strategic Partnership

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Introduction

“For the EU, Canada is a strong ally and a very good friend. Canada shares our vision of the world, our values and our objectives. We are both passionate believers in democracy, rule of law, human rights, solidarity among people and nations, as well as rules-based international order”, the then president of the European Council Donald Tusk remarked at the EU-Canada summit in Montreal in July 2019. Both partners, the EU and Canada, decided at the summit to “intensify EU-Canada relations and step up cooperation to address global challenges” (European Council, 2019). A remarkable statement in turbulent times.

The international environment is becoming increasingly contested, divided and disorderly. Both Canada and the EU confront an unprecedented number of external challenges. Global order is transforming, with the influence of the West declining *vis-à-vis* the rising political and economic power of countries like China. This is compounded by increasing contestation of multilateralism and high volatility of US foreign policy on the background of a strong US preference for bilateralism and a stronger emphasis on its national interests under the Trump administration. For the EU, threats are also coming from its crisis-prone and conflict-laden neighbourhood in the South, a shared neighbourhood with an increasingly assertive Russia in the East, and a fall back to old power games in its relations with the UK and the US in the West. All this is against the background of internal challenges such as diverse crises, internal conflicts about its core values and the Brexit process. This unprecedented turbulence and internal and external changes, suggest the EU is facing new realities (COST Action 17119, MoU, online).

The new realities have aggravated the situation within the EU and added a new layer of complexities to a long-time struggle of the EU and its member states for recognition in the international arena. If the EU and the member states want to remain relevant actors at the international level, then the EU needs “to establish and maintain constructive relationships with existing and emerging powers on the world stage” (Whitman and Rodt, 2012, p. 42). The EU possesses a number of instruments to secure such relations. One of the most prestigious is the instrument of Strategic Partnership. It identifies a group of established and emerging powers which includes Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Korea, South Africa and the US.

This Special Issue focuses on the EU-Canada relations and on their Strategic Partnership in particular. The relations are long-lived – they date back to the 1970s – but only recently did they experience significant deepening. EEAS Deputy Secretary General Pedro Serrano noted in an encouraging manner that “The EU-Canada relationship – like brandy – has gotten better and better with age” (2016). A strong and colourful statement, it hints that if only we give time to a strategic partnership, it will develop and blossom. The reality of other strategic partnerships, as well as assessments coming from Canada, are somewhat different. Time dimension seems to play a critical role in those views, but in a particular way. Within the Special Issue, our team of contributors tackles the following questions:

- How did the EU-Canada Strategic Partnership develop over time?
- What are the drivers for the Strategic Partnership – in the past, present and future?
- What are the interests / strategies of the partners, and how do they evolve over time, when new challenges face the EU, Canada and the world?
- Which conflicts can we detect in the past and present? How do they shape the interaction from now on?
- What is the role of the EU vs. the role of the EU member states in the future for this Strategic Partnership?
- What perceptions and expectations are assigned to those roles?
- Where can we detect new opportunities for cooperation, now and in the foreseeable future?

Our Introductory article starts answering these questions. We first introduce the EU Strategic Partnerships as an instrument of EU policy. We follow with some evidence and lessons learned from our research on EU-Strategic Partnerships with emerging powers. We track similarities and differences between the EU’s more recent partnerships with emerging powers *vis-à-vis* the EU-Canadian partnership as one of the oldest partnerships. From this point, we move on to describe the specific features of the EU-Canada Strategic Partnership with special emphasis on its deepening in the last years. Here, we present a number of the distinct drivers of this Partnership. The introduction ends with an overview of all the contributions to the Special Issue.

EU Strategic Partnerships

In the last 25 years, the EU has built up its Strategic Partnerships at the bilateral level as its response to global power shifts. This initiative reveals that the EU makes an effort to better position itself in a globalised world (Gratius, 2013, p. 1) and gain allies in an effective multilateral order within the UN framework (Keukeleire and Delreux, 2014, p. 300). Strategic Partnerships with the US and Canada date back to 1995 and 1996

respectively, followed by Japan in 2001. The Strategic Partnerships with emerging powers of China and Russia were initiated in 2003, while the EU and India formed a Strategic Partnership in 2004. The more recent partnerships with other emerging powers were concluded with Brazil (2007), South Africa (2007), Mexico (2010) and South Korea (2010). The EU's increased attention to emerging powers reflects global power changes. It is also argued to be symbolic of "the political will of the EU to be part of the new global game" (Gratius, 2013, p. 2). The former High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Catherine Ashton suggested more Strategic Partnerships for the EU in the future (with Egypt, Israel, Indonesia, Pakistan and Ukraine) (Rettman, 2010). However, steps towards making these partnerships 'strategic' have not yet been taken. Nevertheless, the EU and Ukraine signed an Association Agreement in spring 2014 (ratified in 2017). The main obstacle in the prolonged process of its ratification was the negative vote by the referendum in the Netherlands in April 2016 (Van der Loo 2016). Indonesia is mentioned in the EU Global Strategy, in the context of expanding the EU's partnerships (EEAS, 2016a, p. 38). In contrast, Egypt, Pakistan and Israel are not addressed in the Global Strategy as future partners. There is only a reference to "like-minded and strategic partners in Asia, Africa and the Americas" (EEAS, 2016a, p. 43) in relation to tackling global challenges, but without reference to any specific country (Knodt et al., 2018, p. 59f).

Even though the initiative of strategic partnerships is quarter of a century old, the concept remains unclear, as the EU still lacks a clear definition of this term (Knodt et al., 2015c, p. 6). A decade ago, an EU diplomat stated, "It's like love – no one can define it. You only know what it is when you experience it" (cited in Rettman, 2010). In the same period, in 2010, the-then President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, expressed concern about the lack of strategizing vision for the EU in this initiative: "Until now, we had strategic partners, now we also need a strategy" (Council of the European Union 2010). A diplomat remarked that it is not clear "whether, indeed, the others regard us as their Strategic Partners" (cited in Rettman, 2010). It also seems that the EU was not always aware of its Strategic Partnerships. In 2003, the European Security Strategy stated that the EU "should look to develop strategic partnerships with Japan, China, Canada and India" (European Council, 2003, p. 14), overlooking the fact that the EU at that time had already established Strategic Partnerships with Japan and Canada. This insecurity about the definition and significance of its Strategic Partnerships has had consequences for the way the EU choose its strategic partners. The choice did not necessarily take place in a straightforward way. Moreover, the choice of partners reflected the EU's inability to agree and decide which third actors are genuine strategic partners and consequently its inability to behave strategically in relation to these partners (Keukeleire and Bruyninckx, 2011, p. 389, Knodt et al., 2018, p. 60).

Nevertheless, the EU's ongoing commitment to the idea of Strategic Partnerships shows that the EU is set up to deliver comprehensive, contractual, rule-based relationships with its strategic partners in the long term (Whitman and Rodt, 2012, p. 36). As such, the Strategic Partnerships seem to be an aspiration rather than a reality. In most cases, the 'strategic partnership' with the emerging or re-emerging powers is rather a goal to be pursued through a gradual process of interaction than a reflection of reality. In practice, there has been a lack of clear means of implementing the objectives and political goals within the strategic partnerships. The partnership policies often consist of a vague and general catalogue of common political aims which

are hidden by a rhetorical façade (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014, p. 291, Knodt et al., 2018, p. 62).

An important step forward to improve the Strategic Partnerships was the ‘Europe 2020 Strategy’ adopted in 2014. It presented the Partnership Instrument as a “new and complementary instrument providing direct support for the Union’s external policies” (Regulation (EU) No 234/2014, 11.03.2014). It was conceived as a tool to cope with major global challenges (including energy security, climate change and environmental protection) and to support the EU’s strategic interests. Within this conception, the Partnership Instrument contains four main objectives: the provision of policy support for the EU’s external relations and responses to global challenges; projection of the internal dimension of Europe 2020; the improvement of market access, trade, investments and business opportunities for EU companies; and the promotion of public diplomacy and academic cooperation.¹ In order to attain these objectives, shared values and a common vision are crucial. But it seems that in most cases, the launch of Strategic Partnerships has not been able to either facilitate achievement of a common vision or to create shared values in international politics and has not affected the external perceptions of the EU in a positive manner as Keukeleire and Delreux argued (2014, p. 291). In our opinion, the latter finding needs to be handled with a more cautious attitude. The 2015 survey of public opinion on the EU in ten EU strategic partners (PPMI/NCRE/NFG, 2015) demonstrated that the majority of the general public in most of these countries (with exception of Russia) had a positive view of the EU (consisting of ‘very positive’ and ‘somewhat positive’ responses). For example, in the four BICS countries – the major global players – 59 per cent of respondents in Brazil, 56 per cent in China, 63 per cent in India, and 53 per cent nearly chose positive descriptors when they were asked to describe the EU: strong, efficient and multicultural in Brazil; multicultural, modern and strong in China; modern, strong and efficient in India; and strong, modern and multicultural in South Africa (PPMI/NCRE/NFG, 2015).² Public perceptions of the EU in Canada were also reported to be positive (see Chaban, 2019, in this Special Issue).

Finally, most respondents across the BICS countries perceived that the EU’s leadership role in world affairs as both desirable and likely. In terms of desirability, between 50 per cent and 60 per cent of respondents in Brazil and China, and between 60 per cent and 70 per cent in India and South Africa argue for the EU’s strong leadership role (PPMI/NCRE/NFG 2015). In terms of likelihood, in the four BICS countries between 60 per cent and 70 per cent of respondents agree that the EU is likely to take a strong leadership role in the world affairs five years from now (PPMI/NCRE/NFG, 2015). Similar perceptions of the EU as a leader in terms of desirability and likelihood were detected in Canada (Chaban, 2019, in this Special Issue). This indicates that the institution of Strategic Partnership has strong potential to resonate with the public regardless its lack of a clear definition and an actual ‘strategy’ for its Strategic Partnerships with its selected partners (Knodt et al., 2018, 60-62).

¹ Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fpi/what-we-do/partnership_instrument_en.htm [05.05.2016].

² Please note that the “multicultural” descriptor was seen ambiguously, with potentially negative connotations, as 2015 was shaped by the migration crisis and the EU’s handling of it.

Lessons from the EU Strategic Partnerships with emerging powers: only a matter of time?

In the college of the EU's ten strategic partners, Canada often describes itself – and is described by others – as a quintessential “middle power” (see also Zyla, 2019, in this Special Issue). This status is distinctly different to the status ascribed to the US (once a global hegemon) or BRICS (emerging powers). At the same time, Japan, Mexico and South Korea are arguably comparable to the Canada case. In contrast to the latter group, Canada's relations with the EU is among the most mature – with Canada opening its representation in Brussels already in the 1960s, and the EU opening its diplomatic mission in the middle of the 1970s. Can we assume that the duration of a strategic partnership is a factor influencing the quality of this partnership?

From research on the EU strategic partnership in the sector of energy policy we have profound knowledge of the important factors on the quality of a Strategic Partnership (Knodt et al., 2015b). One factor influencing the quality of a Strategic Partnership is the timespan of the partnership. With regard to the emerging powers, China was among the first countries to be identified by the EU as an important partner in the European Security Strategy (European Council, 2003). Respectively, the EU's Strategic Partnership with China was established at the summits in 2003 and dated back to trade and economic cooperation in the 1980s. Indeed, the EU-China dialogue is the oldest one among the EU-BICS Strategic Partnerships, and it shows the highest activity rate. It has evolved considerably, with a detailed institutional set up, an amplification of cooperation areas and a high level of participants. However, the quality of the partnership has remained sub-optimal. Thus, research on EU-BICS relations gives only limited evidence for the assumption that time is the most important factor for the development to strike a high-quality partnership. The quality of other EU-BICS partnerships shows very similar challenges no matter of timing. As shown through a relevant network analysis, EU actors try to reach out to and communicate with the respective BICS actors rather than *vice versa* (Knodt et al., 2015a, 328-330). In addition, BICS actors play a more important role than the EU actors and dominate the network. The EU, however, is marginalized in the dialogue.

Agreements and partnerships of the EU and member states towards the BICS are running on parallel tracks and have at times rivalled each other. Many actors in the BICS engage in cooperation with the EU and the member states at the same time. Research found a certain preference for the approaches of member states voiced by the BICS actors, as it seems unclear where exactly the value is added by cooperation with the supranational institutions of the EU. The BICS countries' preference for cooperation with member states often derives from the EU's unclear mandates and “offers” for energy cooperation. Thus, the EU needs to carve out clearly its message on value added and identify the role it would like to play in energy cooperation with the BICS (Piefer et al., 2015, p. 350f).

This priority assigned by the BICS to the dialogue with EU member states seems to be similar in other bilateral dialogues. Also, the pattern of relations is alike: the relation with the EU and with its member states often go on tracks parallel to each other. Relevant research also points to the lack of knowledge among BICS on member states' bilateral relations with third countries other than their own.

Specifically, for BICS, research demonstrates a low level of interest in the EU in those countries. This contrasts the EU's interest to develop contacts with these four emerging powers. Ambiguity of interests and objectives are prevalent on both sides – the EU and BICS, with both sides profiling a deficit of commitment to the dialogue. Research in the field also observed mutual perceptions of unclear agendas and even a lack of trust. The cacophony of the multiple EU voices – something known in the literature as the EU not 'speaking with one voice' – and institutional fragmentation further complicates the relationship with these strategic partners. Studies in those countries found inadequately defined roles for the EU and overall marginalization of the EU in the dialogue, which may result in highly fragile forms of coordination. The absence of a clear leading position may disturb EU-BICS cooperation and some actors have to face the risk of being isolated from informal communicative networks and information exchange within the dialogues (Piefer et al., 2015, p. 349f).

All the above listed limitations and problems of the EU-emerging power relations do not seem to appear in the EU-Canada Strategic Partnership. We ask what is different?

The development of the EU-Canada strategic relationship – an ever-closer relationship?

The EU-Canada relationship can be dated to the beginning of the European Communities in the 1950s. Amy Verdun groups the history of the EU-Canada relationship into four-time periods (Verdun, 2019, in this Special Issue), starting with the first period from 1959-1976 where a first agreement was signed between the European Atomic Energy Community and Canada in 1959. The EU-Canada relationship was deepened with the 1976 Framework Agreement for commercial and economic cooperation between the European Communities and Canada. The start of the second period from 1977-1996 is characterized by regular middle up to high level meetings, the 1990 Declaration on Transatlantic Relations between the European Community and its Member States and Canada, as well as the 1996 Joint Political Declaration on EU-Canada Relations and Joint EU-Canada Action Plan. These framework agreements were accompanied by several sectoral agreements which Verdun lists in her contribution to this Special Issue. Specifically, the third period between 1997 and 2008 showed many of those sectoral agreements. In 2004, both partners agreed on the EU-Canada Partnership Agenda, and in 2005, on the Agreement between the EU and Canada establishing a framework for the participation of Canada in the EU crisis management operations. Attempts to negotiate a free trade agreement failed at that time. The fourth and current period, according to Verdun (2019), started in 2009 with a sectoral agreement and the effort to negotiate a free trade agreement as well as working towards a strategic partnership. It was only in 2016 that both agreements, the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) were signed by the EU and Canada after long negotiations. The EU-Canada relations have been strengthened significantly in the last four years.

As the quote at the beginning of this introduction stated, the partnership over these periods is based on similar values and interests of both partners (Bendiek and Schenuit, 2019, in this Special Issue). Nathalie Garon, from the Canadian Global Affairs Office, stated with regard to the Strategic Partnership Agreement between Canada and the EU, that it “reflects our shared fundamental values” (Garon, 2016). She lists seven key areas of shared values: international peace and security; counter-

terrorism; the promotion of human rights and non-proliferation; clean energy, environment and climate change; migration and peaceful pluralism; sustainable development; and innovation. Federica Mogherini, the former High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, confirmed this point: “We are completely likeminded partners and since the signing of recent agreements our relations moved to an even deeper and stronger partnership” (European Council, 2017). We argue, this like-mindedness and normative affinity distinguishes the EU-Canada Strategic Partnership from partnerships the EU has with emerging powers, where this kind of compatibility is missing.

In contrast to the current stance of the US government under Trump administration, the EU-Canada summit in July 2019 in Montreal dedicated a long section of its joint declaration on the SPA to the joint action to defend a rule-based international order. It stated:

We reaffirm the importance of protecting, reforming and renewing the rules-based international order, with the UN at its core. We are opposed to all attempts to undermine laws, norms and institutions that govern peaceful international cooperation. We are united in our commitment to multilateralism, democracy and the rule of law (Joint Declaration, 2019).

One powerful example of this shared commitment to multilateralism could be seen in the EU-Canada strong common interests in the areas of climate and energy policies. Both partners support the ambitious and effective implementation of the Paris Agreement by all parties and agreed to work with our international partners to that end (Joint Declaration, 2019). It looks like the new Commission under the leadership of President Ursula von der Leyen and its “European Green Deal” of 2019 will have an impact on the EU-Canada climate and energy policy cooperation.

That the EU-Canadian strategic partnership is reaching a higher level of cooperation can be also seen in the involvement of Canada as a third state in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the EU. As Bendiek and Schenuit elaborate in this Special Issue, the EU has a vital interest in the enhancement of the strategic CFSP/CSDP partnerships, in order “to respond to the evolving challenges in the area of security and defence (migration, counter-terrorism and hybrid threats” (Bendiek and Schenuit, 2019). Such cooperation can take different shapes. Canada has contributed for example to different missions and operations within the Western Balkans countries (e.g. EUFOR Althea, EULEX Kosovo, EUPM BiH and EUFOR Concordia). It also took part in the EU Advisory Mission in Ukraine providing management and technical expertise. In addition, Canada signed a Framework Participation Agreement (FPA) with the EU in November 2005. Two partners also started new initiatives in the area of cybersecurity as a key priority within the CSDP (Bendiek and Schenuit, 2019). Moreover, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) of the EU, founded in 2017 to improve defence cooperation among the EU member states, was opened for Canada to join as a third state (Leuprecht and Hamilton, 2019, in this Special Issue).

If compared with other Strategic Partnerships, the EU-Canada partnership has a high degree of institutionalisation. Under the SPA, an EU-Canada Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) was set up in 2017 in order to strengthen the EU-Canada bilateral relationship, to enhance foreign policy coordination and, to address global challenges

and opportunities. It is supported by the Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC), which among other duties, monitors the developments in the strategic relationship and makes recommendations for efficiencies, greater effectiveness and synergies between the Parties. The JCC also provides an annual report on the state of the relationship to the JMC.

Continuity is yet another feature of this partnership. In reaction to the Canadian elections in October 2019, and the re-election of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the EU welcomed the foreseeable continuity of the EU-Canada cooperation: “The outcome of the Canadian elections gives us the continuity of the work we’ve done, and we see that this work will continue. So therefore, the keyword for us is continuity,” Peteris Ustubs, the EU envoy to Canada, said in an interview with *The Globe and Mail* (Blanchfield, 2019, online).

This rather constructive and multifaceted mode of interaction, characteristic of the present-day relations has not been a given constant. It has had its ebbs and flows. For some, it is Canada who needs to decide what is strategic. In this context we adopt concepts of alignment, dealignment and realignment once proposed to describe elections and party politics in Canada (Johnstone, 2013). We borrow and apply these concepts to explain the evolution of the EU-Canada relations. Historical alignment of Canada with the UK was revised by Canada when the UK joined the EEC. A certain dealignment with the UK – and specifically a severance of preferential trade agreements – was later replaced by a pragmatic policy of diversification (and, arguably, realignment with the UK and the EEC/EC/EU in terms of trade). The trading frictions between the EU and Canada in the 1980s and 1990s, once again triggered realignments, while subsequent development of the dialogue led to revision of the course on both sides and realignment that led to CETA in 2009. SPA is arguably an example of an alignment in political-normative vision. The logic of alignment, dealignment and realignment which chart the evolution of the relationship, informs contributions to this Special Issue. Such a perspective triggers consideration of the relations between the EU and Canada factoring the temporal dimension. Contributions to this volume engage with a set of historical distances (see also Chaban and Chaban, 2018) – very recent events in the EU and Canada, their bilateral relations and on the global stage, as well as events since the start of the European project, as well as events that took place over longer periods of centuries. The contributions to the Special Issue ask how the short to medium and then to long-term temporalities may help to highlight the ups and lows of the relationship, and provide nuances to current developments and future outlooks?

Drivers of cooperation between the EU and Canada

Recognising the historical outlook and longitudinal perspective as crucial, contributions to the Special Issue pose what are the most recent drivers of cooperation? In this regard, contributions consider not only the pattern of engagement or a time horizon of interactions, but also geographical imaginations (see also Chaban, 2019, in this Special Issue). Here, the regional, North American, dimension is paramount. Canada’s very close links to and dependencies on its neighbour, the US, means that the US will remain a constant in how Canada sees its role in the region and in the world. It is one of the main external drivers of the EU-Canada strategic partnership, identified in the literature and as well as in this issue, and has to be seen in the US policy towards both partners, at the global stage and in its perception by the partners.

Three most recent US-related factors are seen to impact EU-Canada relations in the foreseeable future: high volatility of US foreign policy under Trump's administration, the US's preference for bilateralism and its stronger emphasis on its national interests. Benjamin Zyla (2019, in this Special issue) argues, that President Trump, who openly questions "the 'old' world order, threatening to disregard international law, disrespect international institutions and reverting to an isolationist US foreign policy [...] has significantly undermined the transatlantic alliance and its commitment to multilateralism". Thus, of recent Canada and the EU realise that their predominant orientation towards the United States has to be diversified (Verdun, 2019, in this Special Issue; Croci and Verdun, 2004).

In this context, Canada may seek in the EU a counterweight to the US's unpredictability, self-focus and renegeing on multilateral rule-based global order. The EU-Canada partnership may be also intensified by Trump's foreign policy to increasingly reorient away from the partners in Europe and Canada towards the emerging powers of the global south. Further away from Canada is another global "heavyweight" – China. China's economic performance and multilateral initiatives are also predicted to impact Canada's relations with the EU.

Beside external drivers, internal developments of the EU can have a strong impact on the EU-Canada relationship. One example is the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (European Union, 2016). Research in the field of EU strategic partnerships indicates that the EU-Canada relations were strengthened in the recent years. This may be a reflection of the EU's Global Strategy (2016) which prescribed for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy better and closer cooperation with third states. However, the EUGS has been a source of discontent – it mentioned Canada as part of "the Atlantic" region only in one instance, while overlooking it in another one – the one that linked the transatlantic region only to the US. Despite this oversight, the relationship has been marked by major benchmarks – the successful negotiations of the major economic framework of CETA (which currently awaits its final ratifications) and signing of the top-profile political agreement of SPA. The two agreements demonstrate how the partners are succeeding in finding common grounds. The former one is noted by relevant literature to be driven by Canada, the latter one is advocated by the EU heavier than by Canada. Whatever the preferences, the two agreements reflect the range of interests in EU-Canada relations from both sides. CETA is now cited by the EUGS as an example for similar free trades agreements with other third countries (the US, India or Japan).

Naturally, events and developments that take place in Europe are of great importance too. Canada has cherished special relations with the UK and France over the centuries, and perhaps unsurprisingly Brexit is an outstanding issue for the EU-Canada dialogue. Perceptions of the project of European integration and the entry of the UK into the European Communities (with consequence to the members of the Commonwealth, including Canada) are discussed in detail by Chaban (2019). Separation of the UK from the EU will have consequences for Canada's relationship with the EU. In an interesting twist, Brexit will also put the question of relations with third states onto Brussels' agenda. Can Canada be a role model for the UK after Brexit takes place?

As such, Brexit is one of the most important internal drivers in EU-Canada relations. It urges the EU to invest more in its bilateral relations, and specifically into the transatlantic relations. For decades, Canada's relations with the EU were shaped by its

special relationship with the UK. This has put Canada in the role of a bridge-builder (Lyon and Tomlin, 1979) or linchpin (Simpson, 1999) for the US to Western Europe. Zyla (2019, in this Special Issue) describes this role which started being shaped after the end of World War I. Zyla (2019) and Chaban (2019) also argue that the role was facilitated by Canada's special status – the one of a 'middle power'. However, in times of Trump and Brexit, the role of a 'bridge-builder' is in risk of disappearing. The separation of the UK from the EU and the loss of the special relationship between the US/Canada and the UK in the context of the EU-North America relations has consequences for the relationship of the EU to those two countries (see also Bendiek and Schenuit, 2019, in this Special Issue).

Among other influential drivers are the ones on the Canadian side. Both Canada and the EU enter 2020 with new leaders at the helm. On the Canadian side, the outcome of the Canadian federal elections and the re-election of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau may guarantee the continuity of EU-oriented cooperation (see the EU's congratulatory note to Trudeau following the elections (Blanchfield, 2019, online)). On the EU side, new European Commission led by von der Leyen is formulating and projecting its priorities. As discussed above, many of these priorities – especially in the issue-areas of climate, upholding international multilateral rule-based order, as well as traditional and non-traditional security threats (see Leuprecht and Hamilton, 2019 and Hanouna et al., 2019, in this Special Issue) – are shared between Canada and the EU. In addition, Canada's foreign policy has always been influenced by its federal and highly decentralised institutional structure, including a special position for Quebec, where the regional governments gear quiet a great influence on foreign policy compared to other federal states (Zyla, 2019, in this Special Issue). Regional dynamics in Canada will influence how Canadians see the EU and EU-Canada relations and engage with the European Union (Chaban, 2019, in this Special Issue).

Seen from an optimistic point of view, future outlines promising directions for the EU-Canada dialogue. Can we then assume that positive interactions and mutual perceptions will lead this dialogue – now and in the future? Contributions to the SI also engage with the visions and narratives of the EU in Canada and Canada in the EU and provide nuanced insights into the evolutions of images. Perceptions that help to diagnose the situation and select actions are seen to be of relational nature (Chaban, 2019, in this Special Issue, see also Chaban and O'Loughlin, 2018). Time seems to matter, as well as (imaginary) geography and the specific issue in focus.

From a more cautious point of view, despite a rather advanced state of the dialogue between the EU and Canada in comparison to other strategic partners, there is still a substantial discrepancy between ambition and implementation as well as between rationality and emotions. These gaps will inform the content and course of the partnership and invite critical attention of the scholars. Our Special Issue is one of such attempt to address the gaps in the context of changing Europe in the changing world. Contributions to the Special Issue, presented below, engage with the two points of view.

Overview of the contributions

Amy Verdun sets the background to our Special Issue. She gives an overview on the EU-Canada relations since the late 1950s with special focus on the latest agreements. Signed in 1976, the EU-Canada relationship was the first bilateral agreement that the

EU signed with an industrialised third country. Modest strengthening of the ties was achieved with the 2004 EU-Canada Partnership Agenda. A fully-fledged free trade agreement was in the works at this time but suspended in 2006. The EU-Canada SPA and CETA did not materialise until more than a decade later, in 2016. This article focuses in particular on the strategic partnership dimension. It explores why an SPA was possible in 2016, but not before. To answer this question, the study looks at four-time periods. Specifically, it explores the origins of the EU-Canada agreement, how the EU-Canada relationship changed over time, and how a more profound strategic partnership came about when it did. The article considers institutional, domestic and geopolitical factors. In conclusion, it briefly speculates about the possible future of this partnership.

Annegret Bendiek and *Felix Schenuit* continue the argument developed by Amy Verdun. They discuss a growing affinity and synergies between Canada and the EU following the latest benchmarking economic and political agreements of CETA and SPA. The article argues the mutual interests of Canada and the EU in international cooperation, the convergence of their values and cooperation in a number of areas, and growing relevance of this bilateral cooperation in the current era marked by challenges to the multilateral rule-based order. The authors select to focus on two issue-areas in this cooperation – peace and security and climate change. Bendiek and Schenuit see these areas to be among most politically contested foreign and security issues. The article explores how the cooperation between Canada and the EU in these areas – both in a bilateral mode as well as within a newly created ‘Alliance for Multilateralism’ (created in 2019 uniting 60 countries) – may contribute to the preservation and meaningful reform of multilateral institutions, in the nearest future and for years to come.

Focusing on the relationship between Canada and the EU, contribution by *Natalia Chaban* proposes a comprehensive model to explain *perceptions* of this relationship. Treating perceptions as a relational concept, the article develops a geo-temporal matrix following the “mental map” theorization by Didelon-Loiseau and Grasland (2014). The article’s innovative model allows to track the *evolution* of perceptions and discover differing dynamics in the EU’s perceptions over time, depending if the EU and EU-Canada relations are seen in the Canada- vs. EU-specific contexts or on the global level. The regional factor – defined in the article not only as the ‘North American region’ but also as the ‘Transatlantic triangle’ and the ‘Commonwealth’ – adds to the complex ‘mental map’ of perceptions. To demonstrate the model in action, this article consults the key works in this field of EU perceptions in Canada over the last decade. In its concluding discussion, the author argues how the awareness of the *evolution* of images and its particular dynamics may point to the areas where the EU could exercise the most impact in its relations with Canada in the period when the EU and the world are facing major challenges, including a threat to a rule-based global order.

The article by *Benjamin Zyla* invites the readers to revisit the concept of ‘middle power’ at times when the liberal international order’s effectiveness, legitimacy and authority are challenged by growing populism, nationalism and authoritarianism. The article, using Canada as a case-study, provides a comprehensive historical insight into the past, present and future of the ‘middle powers’. Zyla argues that these powers benefited substantially from the stable liberal international world order after World War II. In contrast, the present-day challenges to or changes of this order risk major losses and instability for ‘middle powers’. To counterbalance the grave scenarios, ‘middle powers’,

including Canada and the EU, could play a distinct role in this wave of changes, now and in the future. In this regard, Zyla considers one such function for ‘middle powers’ – intra-alliance bridge-building. The article dissects the potential of Canada and the EU to engage in this process, and specifically in the context of the transatlantic orders. Zyla predicts that failure to succeed in protecting the rule-based liberal order means the threat to the economic prosperity, security, peace, and normative foundations that has nurtured the order.

Security is the theme that leads contribution by *Christian Leuprecht* and *Rhianna Hamilton*. The authors consider benefits of the third-country participation – Canada’s in their case study – in the EU’s security initiative PESCO (the Permanent Structured Cooperation). Conceived to address the concerns about burden-sharing in security domain, this initiative formulates among its objectives the improvement of internal defence cooperation, quick action and resource synergies. Importantly, PESCO has stirred some uneasy sentiments, and specifically in the US. The US wants its European allies to increase their share in security spending, however the US does not want to lose its influence on Europeans, and in NATO specifically. At the same time, some European partners (e.g. France) are keen to use PESCO as an instrument to solidify “strategic autonomy” for Europe in the security arena. The article argues that third countries who are keen to participate in PESCO – Canada including – turn out to be on the receiving end of these tensions. The exclusion of Canadians would disadvantage not only Canada, but also European and transatlantic partners. The authors explore how Canada and the EU have been and continue to be interdependent in the defence matters and how Canada’s cooperation with the EU within the PESCO framework will continue to serve Canadian interests and its commitment to multilateral global institutions.

The contribution by *Simo Hanouna*, *Omer Neu*, *Sharon Pardo*, *Oren Tsur* and *Hila Zahavi* tackles a new challenge in global politics – international political meddling that aims at manipulating and undermining the democratic process and can challenge democracies and their values, as well as their societal resilience. The authors argue that both Canada and the EU face this problematic development. Informed by Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig’s ‘sharp power’ theoretical framework, the paper invites readers to examine the influence of the social media (and Twitter in particular) in the ‘sharp’ power exercise. Proposing a novel method for the automatic detection of political trolls and bots active in Twitter, the paper engages with a large-N dataset built by thousands of accounts invested in Canadian politics (during the October 2019 federal election campaign). The paper also introduces preliminary findings from the May 2019 EU Parliament election and the two 2019 rounds of elections in Israel. The authors discover a unique activity pattern of these ‘invested’ accounts, significantly different from accounts in a control group. A large-scale cross-cross-sectional approach used in the paper enables a distinctive perspective on the role of political communication and enables a debate how Canada and the EU may relate to each other in response to the “sharp power” influences in the present and in the future.

Our Special Issue ends with an article written by a practitioner who is involved in the policy design and execution of EU-Canada strategic partner dialogue. The article by *Antoine Rayroux* (Rayroux, 2019, in this Special Issue) provides an overview of the discussions presented in the Special Issue. It outlines similar challenges the EU and Canada face in the third decade of the 21st century and sets policy recommendations. Its main conclusions serve as a summary to this Special Issue. We share its main

arguments. The strategic partnership between Canada and the EU – the two ‘champions’ and ‘defenders’ of the rule-based order – will have to find innovative ways to deal with the fundamental character of the threats presented by the changes to the international multilateral order. Both partners will have to ask perhaps uneasy questions about the ‘US factor’ in their relations, not lastly due to the retreat of the US from multilateralism. Both will have to revise and prioritise cooperation to address global threats – including climate crisis and hybrid security threats – when mechanisms of international liberal order may not work. And while these scenarios carry a grave undertone to them, a positive bridge-building potential of Canada and the EU towards each other and the world, their mutual respect, feeling of normative affinity and global know-how in shaping multilateral settings opens new uncharted opportunities for the two strategic partners in the rapidly changing world.

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