



Dialogue on Globalization

European and Chinese perspectives on development and the MDG agenda: What to expect from current reform efforts at the United Nations?

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Introduction

Development is rightly seen as the cornerstone of an equitable global system and an indispensable precondition for world peace and stability. UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, found broad international support when he pointed to the interconnectedness of security, development and human rights in his seminal report „In larger freedom: Towards development, security and human rights for all“ (UN 2005a). Following his line of thought, member states unanimously passed an Outcome Document at the Millennium+5 Summit in September 2005 which underlines the centrality of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other internationally agreed development goals (UN 2005b; Martens 2005; Stetten 2005).¹ It also calls for a reform of the operational activities of the UN system in the fields of development, humanitarian assistance and environment.

Accordingly, this paper will trace the two distinct but related efforts aimed at strengthening the UN's position in the international development architecture. The first intergovernmental negotiation process focuses on the role of the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in monitoring the MDGs and in providing a global platform for dialogue and coordination on development issues. The second track analyzed here deals with streamlining UN agencies to achieve system-wide coherence at the operational level. Moving on from there, I will take a look at European and Chinese interests and positions in both areas. Finally, I will attempt to identify relevant issues where Europe and China might find common ground in contributing to a meaningful reform of the UN development system.

1 ECOSOC and the MDG agenda

1.1 MDG-relevant decisions at the Millennium+5 Summit

The Outcome Document contains some important references to the substance and to the implementation of the MDGs. Governments agreed on some remarkable extensions of the established MDG catalogue, for example in regard to reproductive and women's rights and decent work (Fues/Loewe 2005). Reports from UN insiders seem to indicate that efforts by UNFPA (UN population agency) to operationalize and integrate some of these new norms into the regular MDG monitoring framework were frustrated by the UN Secretariat. A possible explanation for this could be the fear of derailing the whole MDG process if modifications to the existing lists of eight goals, 18 targets and 48 indicators were permitted, especially in the case of such an internationally contentious issue like reproductive rights.

The Outcome Document calls on all governments to draw up national MDG strategies by the end of 2006. It can be assumed that this is meant to apply only to certain developing countries, though the text makes no further specification. The omission throws up the general question of how relevant the MDGs are to different country groupings. No doubt, the first six MDGs, which address basic social human rights like food, health and education, stand at the center of poverty alleviation. While more advanced developing nations, especially in Southeast and East Asia, might not deny the importance of reaching the MDGs, they would certainly not attach overarching importance to them in defining national development strategies. In contrast, MDGs seven and eight, which refer to global environmental stability and solidarity, delineate major responsibilities of all states, particularly in the industrialized North. Still, the international

¹For the sake of brevity I will from now on use the acronym MDGs when referring to the „internationally agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals“ which is the official language in UN documents. Many governments, including Germany, as well as civil society organizations reject what they perceive as the narrow focus of the MDGs since they consider the complete Millennium Declaration of the year 2000 as the relevant point of departure. The Declaration also includes text on peace and security and other topics which are not adequately covered by the MDGs. Going beyond the Millennium Declaration, many state and non-state actors would look to the Monterrey Consensus on Financing of Development (2002) and the Plan of Implementation adopted by the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) as equally important normative pillars of the international development system.

MDG process is mostly seen as applying to Sub-Sahara Africa, where social needs are biggest and progress has been slowest.

It is also not clear in practical terms how the Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) in low-income countries, which are strongly guided by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), can and will be linked to national MDG programs. Up to now, UN agencies and the UN Secretariat apparently have not devised effective instruments to assist member states in formulating their MDG plans. This could be an indication of the outright lack of interest on the side of donors as well as of their partners to move in such direction.

In a similar way, it remains to be seen to what extent governments will follow the affirmative decisions of the Millennium+5 Summit on so-called quick wins like anti-malaria measures, general school attendance and chemical fertilizers for small-scale agriculture. These recommendations were adopted from the report of the UN Millennium Project (2005) under the leadership of U.S. economist Jeffrey Sachs which, however, also has become the subject of controversial debates. Critics question the effectiveness of a rapid expansion of official development assistance (ODA) as suggested by Sachs. They argue that absorption capacity is severely limited in many low-income countries as a result of vested political interests, corruption and inadequate governance structures. Sachs and his team, on the other hand, argue in favor of taking a dynamic perspective in which internal deficiencies can be overcome by concerted investment efforts. Still, it appears that the Sachs Report has so far not been accepted by the majority of development actors as the basis for MDG achievement until the year 2015.

1.2 ECOSOC's role in the international development architecture

The Outcome Document spells out some innovative ideas on elevating the status of ECOSOC in the global system.² For one, it was decided that ECOSOC should organize annual ministerial reviews of MDG progress at the national, regional and global level. If taken seriously by all member states, this mechanism could lead to comprehensive reporting on efforts by donor and recipient countries alike. Positive and negative experiences could be distilled from the reports and joint learning processes could be established. In this context, ECOSOC should also exercise its overall mandate in the economic and social realm to look at the impact of global economic structures in trade, debt and finance on reaching the MDGs. ECOSOC's authority could furthermore benefit from the Summit decision to introduce a more flexible schedule of meetings. The Council can now call for ad-hoc meetings on crisis situations for particular countries or regions which threaten progress on the MDGs and development in general.

A second major innovation concerns the establishment of a biennial Development Cooperation Forum by ECOSOC which would call on all relevant actors to coordinate their efforts, in particular World Bank, IMF, regional development banks, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD and new global funds (for example the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria). This seems like a promising step to overcome the present dominance of donor-driven institutions, in particular the World Bank and the DAC, and could open the door to a more inclusive setting in the international development field. It is obvious that important non-OECD donors like China, India, Brazil and South Africa would rather be drawn into a dialogue under the UN roof than participate in proceedings of the Development Assistance Committee where industrialized countries call the shots. After some initial reluctance, even DAC chairman Richard Manning (2006) has come around to recognize the value of the proposed Development Cooperation Forum. If conceived properly and supported politically by a strong North-South alliance, the Forum could become the central mechanism for policy coordination and consensus building in the development arena. Given the long experience of ECOSOC with non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

²As pointed out in Yang (2006), mandate overlap with the General Assembly's Second and Third Committees is a serious problem for ECOSOC. This issue, however, is not addressed in the Outcome Document.

and the business sector this would also be the appropriate channel to establish multi-stakeholder partnerships between state and non-state actors in a transparent and regulated setting.

The pragmatic steps outlined in the Outcome Document would, no doubt, enhance the position of ECOSOC where the principle "one country – one vote" applies and might lead to tensions between this body and powerful institutions under the control of donor countries, especially the World Bank and DAC. Potential conflicts, however, can be managed in a framework of "coopetition" which balances the elements of cooperation and competition if a critical mass of governments from South and North work for this. An important factor in determining ECOSOC's authority will be the issue of standard-setting and conditionality since donors, especially from the West, will insist on linking development transfers to certain modes of behavior by recipient countries. ECOSOC could solve the dilemma between national sovereignty and universal values by drawing on norms embodied in the UN Charter, the General Declaration of Human Rights, UN conventions such as on human and labor rights and on environment as well as relying on the holistic paradigm of sustainable development which has been enunciated by successive UN world conferences.

1.3 Financing the MDGs

The Sachs Report calculates the ODA volume necessary for the timely achievement of the MDGs to be of the order of 135 billion US\$ in 2006 and 195 billion US\$ in 2010. Even those critics who challenge its fundamental assumptions would see a substantial increase in transfers to low-income countries as a prerequisite to progress. The year 2005 brought about a massive growth of official ODA figures to 106 billion US\$ against 80 billion US\$ the year before (DAC 2006). However, as NGOs rightly point out, this expansion mainly came about through debt relief for Iraq and Nigeria and other influences which do next to nothing for MDG achievement.

Since public budgets in industrialized countries are mostly not in a state to support additional aid transfers public attention has turned to innovative financing instruments. The proposed Tobin tax on speculative cross-border currency transactions has run into strong resistance by Western governments and international financial markets. In contrast, the concept of an air ticket levy promoted by the so called Lula Group, an alliance of like-minded Western and developing countries under Brazilian-French leadership, has gained momentum (Schroeder 2006). France and Chile will introduce the new instrument shortly; the United Kingdom has pledged to channel a share of the existing levy towards development purposes. During the first stage, the revenues from the levy will be used for immunization programs.

Internal resources must also play an important role in MDG financing. Developing countries committed to the MDG agenda could draw some inspiration from the 20/20 initiative which originated from the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) reports on human development in the early 1990s. This crude formula which can only serve as a general point of orientation, advises developing countries to allocate 20 per cent of public budgets for basic social services (basic education, primary health services, water and sanitation for the poor) while donors are expected to direct 20 per cent of their ODA towards these purposes. It is equally clear, and here the international debate owes a lot to the Sachs Report, that comprehensive MDG strategies cannot limit themselves to the provision of social services but must care for a supportive macro policy framework. They also have to strengthen the productive capacities of the poor and link dynamic, modern parts of the economy with the informal sectors (Messner/Wolff 2005).

2 System-wide coherence in operational activities

2.1 Present deficiencies of the UN development system

There is a wide-spread feeling in the international development community that the operational activities of the UN system suffer from serious fragmentation, mandate overlap and duplication. In many instances, member states have chosen to create new agencies for additional purposes, like the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) after the Stockholm environmental conference in 1972, without a clear consideration of the impact on the overall coherence and performance of UN structures. At the country level, UN agencies traditionally act independently of each other, often competing against one another in fund-raising and in impressing their relevance on the domestic government. One prominent example of the proliferation of UN actors without relevant resources at their disposal is Vietnam. There, eleven UN agencies together account for only 2 per cent of total ODA flowing into the country.

The effectiveness of UN development efforts is further impaired by the reluctance of Western donors to entrust their resources to institutions where they do not command the majority of votes. Instead, they prefer the World Bank with its skewed majority rule or opt for bilateral programs. Operational activities and governance arrangements within the UN system are further complicated by differences in status of the respective agencies. While UN Funds and Programmes like UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF are sub-organs of the General Assembly and administratively function under the guidance of the Secretary-General, specialized agencies like WHO, UNIDO, FAO and ILO enjoy full autonomy with their own statutes, budgets and intergovernmental supervisory bodies.

Originally, there was a clear separation of functions between these two groups. Funds and Programmes were in charge of implementing specific projects on the ground. Specialized agencies would focus on standard-setting and knowledge creation in their area of expertise. Over the years, the dividing line has become blurred. Funds and Programmes have emerged as important actors in norm creation, e. g. UNEP in environmental affairs, UNICEF and UNFPA in children's and women's rights respectively, while specialized agencies have been charged by their member states to move into operational measures of their own, in particular WHO and FAO. The fragmentation is further deepened by activities of the Secretariat, for example the Department for Economic and Social Affairs, and regional commissions of the UN. It also worries defenders of UN coherence that member states continue to set up new funding mechanisms like the recently established Democracy Fund which is managed by the Secretariat. At this point in time it is not clear if the Peacebuilding Standing Fund will be integrated into an existing organization like UNDP or will come into being as another stand-alone entity under the Secretariat's control.

2.2 Harmonization at the country level

More and more member states as well as UN agencies and staff have come to realize the urgent need for reform to prevent the complete marginalization of the world organization in the international development architecture. At the headquarters level, Kofi Annan in 1997 established the UN Development Group (UNDG) which comprises all institutions with operational activities. The World Bank participates as an observer. UNDG is led by an Executive Committee (Ex Com) which consists of the four agencies whose heads are directly appointed by the Secretary-General, namely UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and WFP. UNDG's cooperation efforts are supported by a small office drawn mostly from UNDP staff. While discussions at the headquarters have produced important steps towards harmonization the most relevant progress has taken place at the country level. The long-term objective is to establish a single unified UN presence under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator ("one management, one programme, one budget, one office"). This cannot be accomplished under the present system since staff of a specific agency have to

follow their internal chain of command. The Resident Coordinator has no real power over human and financial resources yet, but has to rely on moral persuasion.

So far, the instruments of joint analysis and policy coordination within the UN family like the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and the Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) have not led to a genuine integration of planning, implementation and monitoring but rather added another mostly cumbersome layer of formalized interaction. Activities are still driven by separate agency-specific decision processes. This is also true at the governance levels. For example, the boards of UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA have initiated joint sessions. But they only serve consultative purposes without any decision-making power. Apparently, the time has now come for some real change to be introduced at the country level. At the urging of the Vietnamese government UNDG Excom agencies in this country have committed themselves to a complete integration on the basis of the "One UN" principle by the end of 2007. Specialized agencies are requested to join in this process but they would need prior authorization from their respective boards.

2.3 Reform dynamics after the recent summit

After the Millennium+5 Summit, reform dynamics within the UN development system have picked up speed. A new "appetite for change" can be felt though this does not guarantee meaningful achievements in the near future. Responding to the Outcome Document of the Millennium+5 Summit, Kofi Annan established a "High-level panel on UN system-wide coherence in areas of development, humanitarian assistance and environment" in February 2006 (UN 2006). Its membership represents an unusual set of actors for such consultative body which often call on elder statespeople and retired officials. The panel's three co-chairs are the acting Prime Ministers of Pakistan, Mozambique and Norway. Some of the regular members also hold high positions in their respective governments, e. g. UK Finance Minister Gordon Brown. The high degree of ownership at the government level may ensure that the panel's recommendations expected by the summer of 2006 will find acceptance in the General Assembly even after Kofi Annan has left his office at the end of this year.

It can be assumed that the panel will strongly support the ongoing reform efforts at the country level ("One UN"). In the medium and long-term perspective the body might suggest the merger and/or closure of certain agencies to strengthen overall effectiveness. A currently debated idea is the possible merger of UNFPA, UNIFEM and the Secretariat's Division for the Advancement of Women into a strong voice for women's and gender perspectives which is lacking under the present institutional arrangements (Deen 2006). A less radical proposal would be the clustering of institutions according to issue areas like development, humanitarian assistance and environment.

Developing countries have expressed reservations towards the reform effort at the UN development system which so far is mostly promoted by Western countries. They suspect that the desire for cost savings on the donors' side is the main motivation behind this drive. On top of this, they might also fear to lose influence and power in regard to staff positions and intergovernmental bodies. In a letter to the co-chairs of the panel the Chairman of the G77 in New York has emphasized that the coherence exercise must strengthen the role of the UN so that it becomes the premier international organization dealing with economic, social and development issues: "The G77 and China believe that the exercise of system-wide coherence should not erode the mandate, resources and activities of organisations and units that play an important role in development" (Khor 2006).

The decisions taken in the current reform round will most likely determine the status of the UN within the international development architecture for a long time to come. If member states cannot agree on substantive institutional innovations they might jeopardize the survival of UN agencies since donors will look for more effective channels in a rapidly changing environment for international cooperation. If,

however, the UN system is streamlined and begins to act as a unified force it could be built up into a global actor and provide some counter-balance to the present dominance of the World Bank (Messner et al. 2005). This scenario, of course, could only come about if the financial resources allocated to UN development activities are substantially increased.

3 The role of Europe and China in the reform process

3.1 European and German perspectives

Most European countries share the sharp criticism of present shortcomings and have come out as strong supporters of a reformed UN development system. The most articulate ones in this respect are loosely linked together in the so called Utstein group of like-minded countries of which Germany is a member. While they have not taken a joint position on the favored reform option, individual countries have voiced their preferences. For example, the Netherlands lean towards a solution of three institutional pillars charged with comprehensive responsibilities in the fields of development, humanitarian affairs and environment respectively. The German Development Ministry speaks out in favor of a unitary funding body as a long-term solution through which all financial decisions on operational activities have to be channeled. The implementation could then still be handled by different agencies. However, Germany's authority in UN circles suffers from the fact, that voluntary contributions to UN Funds and Programmes have been cut back significantly with the transfer to UNDP, for example, shrinking from over 70 million Euro in the middle of the 1990s to roundabout 26 million Euro today.

European countries are strongly supportive of the MDG agenda and have committed themselves to reach an ODA quota of 0.7 % (in relation to GDP) by the year 2015. Each one of the old European Union members has agreed to reach a minimal value of 0.51 % in 2010. It is hard to see how this could be accomplished just relying on public budgets and debt relief. It is, therefore, somewhat disappointing to see that innovative financing mechanisms have found little support at the EU level with the notable exception of France and the UK which will use the ticket levy and the mobilization of future aid resources through the capital markets (International Financing Facility) for immunization programs. Towards the Asian drivers of global change European policies are not yet adequately re-oriented (Humphrey/Messner 2006). There is a controversial public debate to what extent these emerging global players with considerable foreign exchange reserves should continue to receive foreign assistance. The German concept of anchor countries which is followed by the Development Ministry argues for the continuation of cooperation programs which are directed towards the MDGs and joint efforts for the provision of global public goods, like security, economic stability and environmental sustainability (BMZ 2005).

European countries are also ambivalent towards the future role of ECOSOC. While they tend to support a strengthening of this body, with Germany and Belgium leading an initiative in this direction, they are not yet ready to question the preeminence of the World Bank and the OECD's Development Assistance Committee in the international system. So far, there is also little support for concrete steps towards an inclusive global governance structures, for example by linking innovations of the summit architecture (L20+) with UN reform.³ Europeans and Western countries are keenly aware about the growing importance of non-OECD donors like China, India, Brazil and South Africa. They could perceive this trend

³L20+ refers to a possible transformation of the existing G20 of finance ministers and central bank governors into a summit of heads of state and government (L=leaders) (Linn/Bradford 2006). The composition of the new group could deviate from the present set of G20 countries to include actors from the UN system and certain low-income countries (Cooper/Fues 2005). Cooper (2006, p. 1) looks at the L20+ concept in a historical fashion: "It (the L20) has some commonalities with past attempts to develop concerts of dominant powers in eras of turbulence and transition". Feng (2006) emphasizes the Chinese interest in a transformed summit architecture but presently sees no scope for Chinese leadership on this. Yang (2006) outlines the possibility of a future L20+ which could be integrated into ECOSOC and act as its executive council.

as a threat to their influence on other developing countries, especially in Africa. There is also a growing concern about the possible impact of these donors on DAC standards with regard to good governance, democratic systems and human rights. The recipients of such transfers, on contrast, may appreciate the new options and additional policy spaces provided by competing forces (Washington consensus versus Beijing consensus). The most obvious objective of Western countries would be to draw other donors into the DAC framework and convince them of the benefits of common standards. This may be hard to accomplish since the DAC is generally considered as club of the industrialized countries which is not in tune with the aspirations of the developing world.

3.2 Chinese perspectives

Apart from its stand against the expansion of the Security Council, in particular with regard to potential Japanese membership, the Chinese government has taken a low profile in the current UN reform process. In general, China speaks out in support of developing countries and aligns herself with the positions of the G77 in the UN context. The country also backs the MDGs and has shown increasing interest in deepening its economic and political ties with other countries of the global South. Simultaneously, there is a growing awareness in China of global interdependencies and of the need “to make domestic political decisions more and more from a global perspective” (Ruan 2005, p. 45). In a series of four speeches, President Hu Jintao used the Millennium+5 Summit as a platform to announce the new Chinese concept for “building a harmonious world” which is based on the goals of worldwide peace, prosperity, justice and equality (Qian 2006, Wu 2005, Tang 2005). Hu also disclosed a comprehensive set of measures aimed at low-income countries with which it has diplomatic relations (Qin 2006).⁴ The package includes:

- zero tariff treatment to certain products from 39 LDCs which covers most of the China-bound exports from these nations,
- debt relief on a bilateral level for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) with regard to overdue parts of their interest-free and low-interest governmental loans,
- 10 billion US\$ in concessional loans and preferential export buyer's credit to developing countries over the course of the next three years,
- increased assistance in the medical field, particularly to African countries,
- training of 30.000 personnel of various professions for developing countries within the next three years.

It is obvious that these activities will be carried out in a bilateral framework with exception of the medical assistance, parts of which could be implemented through the Forum on China-Africa cooperation. The announced programme apparently does not include additional contributions to the UN system such as voluntary payments to UNDP. However, Feng (2006) is convinced that the former Chinese focus on bilateral approaches is giving way to a stronger interest in multilateral affairs. In a historical perspective, Wang (2003) also sees a clear trend of China deepening its engagement with the international organizations since the beginning of internal reforms in 1979.

At this stage, it is unclear to what extent China might consider to cooperate with industrialized countries on a common framework of norms and standards for international cooperation, as for example spelled out in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of March 2005 (DAC 2005). Western governments are particularly worried about China's cooperation with countries of questionable human rights and

⁴Qin (2006) also points to the commitment of the Chinese government towards achieving the MDGs domestically and underlines the progress made so far. According to long-term government plans, poverty within the country should be completely eliminated by the year 2020. The UNDP (2005) report on China states that most MDGs will be achieved by 2015, but enormous challenges of social disparities and environmental sustainability will persist.

governance performance, like Zimbabwe and Sudan. In strict observance of the principle of non-intervention, Chinese authorities insist on de-linking foreign relations from the internal affairs of their partners. The reference often made in this respect to Article 2 of the UN Charter, however, does not take into account the dynamic extension of the traditional concept of sovereignty. Moving beyond the so called Westphalian notion of unquestioned national sovereignty, which was enshrined in peace treaties after the Thirty Years' War in Europe (1618-1648), international relations have begun to take into consideration not only the rights but also the obligations of nation states towards their own populations as well as to the international community. By adopting the new norm of the "responsibility to protect" in the Millennium+5 Summit's Outcome Document, all member states have, in principle, accepted the new orientation of international law.

Western apprehensions are also driven by the concern that China's aid efforts could be dominated by her primary wish to secure natural resources and energy on a global scale for her booming economy. As perceived from the outside, this might undercut the Western quest for universal standards in the international development community. However, Western countries themselves are quite used to mixing diverse political and economic interests with their assistance programmes. Furthermore, they should not disregard the legitimate nature of Chinese resource needs, particularly with regard to energy security, to support growth and social development (He/Qin 2006). It should also not be forgotten, that Chinese imports of natural resources indirectly benefit the West since they are used for manufacturing export products. However, considering the limits to global supplies and the endangered stability of global ecosystems, there is an urgent need for a negotiated equitable distribution of natural resources on our shrinking planet.

With regard to UN reform in the development field it would be important to know how China feels about strengthening ECOSOC's role in the MDG process and in general norm-setting for international cooperation. It would also be relevant to see if the Chinese government would support the realignment of the operational activities even if this entails the merger and/or closure of certain agencies.

3.3 Possible common ground for Europe and China in UN reform

In a general observation, Qian (2006, p. 3) points to conflicting interests in UN reform between the West and developing countries: "(A) few developed countries and the U.S. in particular, maintain that the U.N. reform should serve their purpose of promoting Western values and the political and economic system. In other words, they try hard to bring the reform into the orbit of a new world order to be dominated by a superpower or a group of the most powerful Western nations." Wu (2006 p. 2) argues in a similar vein: "(T)he UN is in danger of deviating from its multilateral nature toward a unilateralist one..." Judging from these sentences, the European Union has yet to convince China and other developing countries that she is ready to break with the historic pattern of dominance and wishes to embark on collaborative efforts for a post-colonial architecture of global governance. Multiple objective interests of China and Europe, indeed, point in this direction. Both actors are highly integrated into the world economy and thus equally dependent on global stability. Against this backdrop, they are keenly aware that their prosperity and security can only be maintained on a long-term basis if the legitimate development needs of poor countries are addressed through an inclusive multilateral system.

While a comprehensive global compact which balances the interests of all countries will need a while, the development area could become the testing ground for an enhanced understanding and cooperation between Europe and China. The European side, therefore, should quickly respond to the major shift of Chinese global policies towards "building a harmonious world" as articulated by President Hu Jintao during the Millennium+5 Summit. According to these pronouncements, China is ready to accept her share of responsibility for an equitable world order. And Europe has emphasized over and over again its interest

in effective multilateralism as the only feasible response to growing interdependencies and risks in the global system.

The proclaimed intentions of China and Europe and the objective requirements of managing an ever more complex global governance system imply converging interests of both sides which, in turn, call for a shared purpose in global affairs and new modes of interaction. The time has come to translate analytical insights and policy announcements into practical steps as a high-ranking official of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has recently observed: "China and the EU, as two rising forces, now have become the most active factors in international relations... Both China and the EU attach great importance to the international multilateral system with the UN at the core and to the rule of global governance." (Zhengde 2005, p. 104 and 107). Their collaboration should, of course, not be directed against any third party but focus on support for the MDGs and on strengthening the UN's role in the international development architecture. Together, Europe and China could make a positive difference in all developing regions (for example in the form of triangular programmes) and at the global level, particularly within the UN system. The reform of ECOSOC and UN agencies could then serve as the appropriate arena for a new quality of cooperation. Once incremental success has been accomplished here, the momentum could be carried forward to other fields of UN reform and international relations.

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