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“The EU's strategic Partnerships in Asia - common concepts, diverging connotations”

At a meeting of EU leaders and foreign ministers in Brussels on September, 16th, 2010, Baroness Ashton presented an updated list of “strategic partners” of the European Union in the world, of which the major part lies in Asia – four in the Asia-Pacific area, plus countries like India, Pakistan in South Asia. Big hopes are set on the coming European External Action Service (EEAS) and the provisions of Lisbon to fill these strategic partnerships with life – as an EU official defined the strategic partnership concept: “It's like love - no one can define it. You only know what it is when you experience it.” Yet comparing the debates within the EU about EU foreign and security policy towards the region and debates within these countries, e.g. in China and India, show that the understanding of the same concepts differ between the EU “senders” of norms and values and the intended “recipients”. On the case study of the EU-India and the EU-China strategic partnership, this paper aims to shed light on possible approaches to explain these differences, drawing on an interdisciplinary approach based on research on diffusion- and transfer process. It will make the case the different connotations and expectations linked to a commonly used language and referred to concepts in these strategic partnerships need to be identified, analyzed and assessed in order to draw up a more effective EU policy with these (re-)emerged powers and for the ever more salient Asia Pacific region.