

DOI : 10.14746/rie.2025.19.16

ALEKSANDRA ADAMISZYN-KONTEK¹Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
ORCID: 0000-0003-1000-9722**MIKOŁAJ SOKOLSKI**Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
ORCID: 0000-0002-4538-5149

The European Union's relations with non-democratic countries: the case of the Republic of Cuba and the People's Republic of China.

A comparative perspective – 2004 and 2024

Introduction

The European Union's (EU) relations with non-democratic countries are an important subject of research in both theoretical and practical terms in the field of international relations. In the face of dynamic social, political and economic changes, the analysis of these relations takes on particular cognitive and practical significance. The aim of this article is to conceptualise the conditions and mechanisms and to assess the nature of the European Union's relations with non-democratic countries, using the Republic of Cuba (RC) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) as examples, in a comparative analysis covering the years 2004 and 2024. Contemporary international relations are characterised by highly dynamic changes and the growing complexity of the processes that determine their shape. The fundamental factor influencing this state of affairs in relations between democratic and non-democratic states is axiological differences. Value systems determine the way internal and external policies are shaped and set the limits of possible cooperation. At the same time, they make it possible to identify areas of convergence and divergence between the entities in question. The research is based on the assumption that the EU's foreign policy is currently based on a combination of normative and geo-economic approaches. On the one hand, the EU defines itself as a community of values and a normative actor. On the other hand, it strategically uses economic instruments. In this article, these two dimensions are not contradictory, but coexist. Values are often used to justify geo-economic actions, which is part of a broader spectrum of the economisation of foreign policy (Youngs, 2010; Damro, 2012).

Analyses of relationships between the EU and non-democratic countries were conducted through typical research approaches that appears in European studies, not



¹ This article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike License (CC-BY-SA 4.0).

classical international relations theories. It's based on traditional research on external governance and Europeanisation beyond the EU. The accent of the research was shifted from systemic to institutional and comparative approaches of EU external influence (Manners, 2002). This approach gives more possibilities to grasp and explain the dynamics of the relations between the EU's normative declarations and geoeconomic practices. The used concepts are: *ad extra Europeanisation*, democratisation, value-based partnership (Heiduk, 2024, pp. 10–11), and a cognitive category present in psychology, i.e. change theory (Manners, 2003; Zielonka, 2006, 2008). Due to the multifaceted nature of this issue, the authors decided to focus on two cases: relations between the EU and Cuba, and between the EU and the People's Republic of China. Both cases served to illustrate the tensions between the EU's normative and economic internal and external policies and to capture the limitations of the EU as a global actor.

The process of Europeanisation *ad extra*, i.e. the influence on the international environment, is one of the key interpretative tools for assessing the influence of democratic entities (in this case, the European Union) on non-democratic ones (the Republic of Cuba and the People's Republic of China). In this context, the process of democratisation, understood as political and social transformation resulting from cooperation based on bilateral agreements, is an important element in the analysis of the EU's relations with China and Cuba, as confirmed by Freedom House research from 2024. Another tool for evaluating EU-Cuba and EU-China relations is the concept of value-based partnership (Heiduk, 2024, p. 5). The EU's relations with other countries can be divided into those based on values (the same or similar) (value-based partnership) and those based on pragmatic economic considerations (non-value-based partnership) (Heiduk, 2024, p. 15).

In recent years, the second form of relationship building has begun to run its course. This state of affairs is due to recent events, including the global COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which have led to a change in the perception of international relations and a shift towards value-based relationships. As part of the theoretical framework developed, we have included the theory of change, which is present in psychological and social literature. Based on the categories of perception, understanding and behaviour regulation, it allows us to present the change in the perception of an international actor, enabling an analysis of the European Union's relations with China and Cuba in the years 2004–2024. This analysis provides valuable insights into these relations, especially in the context of the intensification of cooperation between the Republic of Cuba and the People's Republic of China since 2017.

The aim of the article is to conceptualise the conditions and actions taken and to assess the European Union's relations with non-democratic countries, using the Republic of Cuba and the People's Republic of China as examples, from a comparative perspective covering the years 2004 and 2024. The adopted research perspective is diachronic and focuses on identifying changes in the process of shaping relations between the EU and the indicated partners over a period of two decades. The analysis aims to capture both continuity and turning points in EU policy towards undemocratic regimes. The analysis focuses in particular on axiological and economic factors, which are treated as determinants of its actions. Based on this context, the authors of the analysis formulate the following research questions:

1. How do shape relations between China and the European Union and between Cuba and the European Union in 2004 and 2024?
2. How has the European Union's attitude towards the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Cuba changed in the context of value inconsistency (democratic and non-democratic systems)?

Based on the above questions, two hypotheses are put forward:

Hypothesis 1: The nature of the European Union's relations with authoritarian states is determined by their strategic importance².

Hypothesis 2: As its external relations develop, the European Union is increasingly limiting the deepening of cooperation with non-democratic countries, guided by the growing importance of consistency with its own democratic values.

In order to better explain the decisions and limitations of EU foreign policy, a two-level logic should be adopted (Putnam, 1988). It assumes that foreign policy is shaped by parallel interactions at the international level and internal pressure from interest groups. In this case, the EU's logic is multi-level. Decisions on relations with non-democratic countries are the result of a compromise between the interests of members, business groups, non-governmental organisations and EU institutions. As might be expected, this is clearly evident in relation to China, where German economic interests limit the scope for a more coherent normative policy (Brinza et. al., 2024).

This analysis is based on an analysis of existing data, including Freedom House reports and indices (Freedom House, 2024), Statista data (Statista, 2024) and a review of the literature on international relations between the EU and Cuba and the EU and China. The authors also analyse the content of other documents and EU legal acts directly related to the issue of democratisation and the European Union's relations with the non-democratic countries indicated. A comparative analysis of these relations allows conclusions to be drawn about the evolution of relations in the context of changing values and international conditions. The case studies were analysed according to the following framework: historical context of relations; economic importance of the partner; normative influence of the EU; effects and limitations of EU actions.

Democratisation – analysis of the concept

The concept of democratisation is widely described in the literature on the subject. Among Polish authors describing democratisation processes is Witold Morawski. For him, democratisation is a decisive restructuring of the entire state as well as society. "He distinguishes two phases of democratisation. The first is procedural in nature and consists in the implementation of institutional solutions in the structure of the state, while the second consists in the social acceptance of democratic principles" (Morawski, 1998, pp. 198–219). Among Polish researchers, Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska also stands out, emphasising that "democratisation is a long and difficult process that goes through three phases: a) preparatory, related to the introduction of principles, values

² Strategic importance for the authors is understood as: economic importance (the partner's share in global trade and EU investments); geopolitical importance (the entity's regional influence on security); normative importance (role in shaping human rights and rule of law standards).

and procedures into the new regime; b) decision-making, in which the transition from an undemocratic to a democratic regime takes place; c) normalisation, stabilising the democratic regime" (Dobek-Ostrowska, 1996, pp. 15–16).

Among foreign researchers, Atilla Agh's analysis of the concept of democratisation stands out. He believes that democratisation is "a process of transformation towards democracy, which as a regime is complex and multidimensional in nature, as it relates to the political, economic and social spheres" (Agh, 1998, pp. 7–12). Another foreign author describing this process is Larry Diamond. He emphasised that elections are a moment of change as a marker of the beginning of the democratisation process. „He notes, however, that this procedural and fundamental requirement must be complemented by a process of strengthening political institutions, implementing programmes to improve the functioning of democracy, generating active forms of citizen participation in public life, and engaging elites in relations with society. Otherwise, a reversal of democracy will occur (Diamond, 1999, pp. 1–8, 64–73). Dankwart Rustow divides this process into three stages: „the preparation stage, in which political and social conflict emerges; the transformation stage, in which institutionalisation begins; and the consolidation of democracy stage, when normalisation and acceptance of democratic principles take place" (Rustow, 1970). In defining the above term, the authors of the study emphasise the role of democratic changes in authoritarian systems, which include both Cuba and China. Referring to this concept, they point to elements/processes of change over 20 years of relations between these entities and the European Union.

Europeanisation – analysis of the concept

Europeanisation is an important subject of research not only in the European dimension, but also in the field of political science and international relations. Europeanisation is a process that has a specific impact through the introduction of new regulations and leads to changes in identities (Wach, 2016, pp. 20–22). According to S. Bulmer and M. Buch, Europeanisation is the degree of influence of a particular policy on the political objectives of Member States (Bulmer, Burch, 1998, p. 602). T. Borzel noted that Europeanisation is a process whereby areas of domestic policy become increasingly subordinate to European policy-making (Wach, 2016, p. 17). J. Ruszkowski notes that this is „a process that works so effectively between EU Member States that it could be exported to third countries as an effective way of guaranteeing peace through the internal transformation of the state towards democracy and the market" (Ruszkowski, 2016, pp. 20–22). Janusz Ruszkowski also notes that „Europeanisation can be intentional, i.e. planned and consciously carried out with a specific intention and more controlled, or unintentional, i.e. unplanned, which may have previously unanticipated and unforeseen effects" (Ruszkowski, 2019, p. 69). The most important element of Europeanisation is influence. It is a dependent variable, primarily the result of conscious and targeted action or intervention. Europeanisation is therefore a continuous change in connection with the transfer or deepening of European characteristics. It is presented as a transfer of solutions and values and can be represented as follows: actions àffects ainfluence.

An attempt to understand the term Europeanisation is also based on the so-called Europeanisation *ad extra*, which is a form of external presentation of the European model. Thus, it drives the EU's external policy. Europeanisation *ad extra* affects the international environment not only through external borders, but also through cultural or even axiological borders. The European Union divides its mechanisms of influence into smart power and hard power. In the first case, these are soft attributes,³ which include, among others, knowledge, legal norms, ideas and standards of behaviour. Hard power includes military missions and, above all, economic potential. „Europeanisation *ad extra* may therefore have a geopolitical dimension, as it affects the international system and its individual elements and areas (e.g. external economic or ecological Europeanisation).

The European Union influences the international environment through its economic, political and military power (attractive power). It is a powerful centre of gravity that exerts influence externally. [...] The European Union's external governance is a method of Europeanisation directed at its international environment" (Ruszkowski, 2019, p. 181). In external governance at the supranational level, the European Union focuses primarily on concluding trade agreements. In this regard, the EU is strengthening its position, particularly as a global actor. Based on the term described above, the authors of the paper pointed to specific actions of the European Union in the further part of the paper, and on this basis they determined the effects of Europeanisation *ad extra* and its impact on other international players: Cuba and China.

Value and non-value based partnership – analysis of the approach

The year 2022 was crucial from the point of view of international relations. In connection with the slow recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the simultaneous reduction of mutual dependencies (especially economic ones), the category of value-based and non-value-based relations emerged within the theory of international relations. This shift in foreign policy is evident in the diplomatic activities of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in the context of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's announcement of *Zeitenwende*, or "turning point" in German policy (Biba, 2023). As part of its long-standing cooperation with China (under the positive conditions resulting from globalisation), Germany has developed a number of dependencies (Blumensau, 2022, p. 1908) which, in the era of successive crises, have led to a change in the way foreign policy is conducted and to broadly understood securitisation. As a result, German economic policy has taken steps to diversify its partners in the Indo-Pacific region (Heiduk, 2024, p. 4), in order to avoid a series of dependencies, as in the case of re-

³ The authors understood soft attributes in the classical sense proposed by Nye, as the ability to shape the preferences of other entities and actors through the attractiveness of values, culture and policies. In the case of the EU, the term has a different meaning. From a theoretical point of view, soft power is referred to as Europe's normative power (Manners, 2002) and also as Europe's market power (Damro, 2012), which is essentially treated as the use of norms and economic mechanisms to influence the internal environment. This definition of soft power emphasises the link between the axiology and economisation of the EU's actions.

lations with China. However, the selection of partners is based on a different formula than before, known as *value-based partnership* (Heiduk, 2024, p. 5). This assumption represents a change in Germany's previous policy, which was characterised by decisions on partnerships based on economic optimisation (Blumenau, 2022, p. 1907).

The basic factor in the form of values concerns the search for partners who share the same or similar values, which is intended to eliminate potential conflicts that go beyond the scope of agreements. However, this way of building relationships is not unique to Germany. The European Union also pursues a policy and builds relationships based on values, although it did not initially express this explicitly in official strategic documents, but nevertheless emphasises their importance (Brinza, Berzina-Cernkova, Le Core, Seaman, Turcasnyi, Vladisljev, 2024, p. 33). The translation of the indicated category of *value-based partnership* (into relations between the EU and China and the EU and Cuba) is justified insofar as it provides interpretative tools that enable the identification of an appropriate perspective for changing the perception of international relations.

Normative Power Europe

The concept of „Normative Power Europe” corresponds to *value-based partnerships*. Proposed by Ian Manners in 2002 (Manners, 2002, pp. 235–258), posits that the European Union's strength lies primarily in its normative influence. Through its ability to shape global debate, the EU influences the development of norms and the establishment of international standards. According to Manners, this is the greatest possible power of the European Union, which is linked to the promotion of universal values, i.e. the rule of law, human rights, democracy and sustainable development.

However, the current theoretical debate points out that the NPE theory is overly idealistic. This is linked to political practice, which in many situations becomes blurred when it comes into conflict with politics relating to economic issues (Hyde-Price, 2006, pp. 217–234). On the other hand, the criticism refers to the Machiavellian nature of the EU, i.e. values and the very discussion of norms can serve to legitimise its interests and actions. Nevertheless, in the process of paradigm shift in international relations, it can be observed that values are increasingly emerging as a key factor, as confirmed, among other things, by the EU's search for alternative key partners in the Indo-Pacific region, based on compatibility in this area, as confirmed by the category of “value-based partnerships” (Heiduk, 2024).

European Union – Republic of Cuba (2004 and 2024)

Diplomatic relations between Cuba and what was then the European Communities were first established in 1988. Cuba had been receiving humanitarian and development aid since 1984. From the outset, relations between the selected entities were not easy due to the regime in place there. „The victory of the 26th of July Movement and Fidel Castro meant a radical change. The existing state apparatus and all parties, institutions

and organisations associated with the overthrown regime were abolished. At least in theory, efforts were made to improve the economic situation of the population, and large-scale agricultural and economic reforms were introduced. Castro, a hostage of Soviet support, began to hastily implement the idea of socialism in Cuba (Kroczał, 2013, p. 279).

As Prime Minister of Cuba, Fidel Castro pursued radical policies, most notably nationalising private trade and industry. He also created a one-party government, which allowed him to control all aspects of the state (politics, economy, culture). Any opposition was ruthlessly suppressed, which led to emigration. „At the same time, Castro significantly expanded social services in the country, extending them to all social classes on an equal basis. Cubans had access to free education and healthcare, and every citizen was guaranteed employment. However, the Cuban economy did not achieve significant growth nor did it reduce its dependence on the country's main export product, cane sugar. Power was concentrated in a centralised bureaucracy led by Castro, who proved to be an inept economic manager” (Britannica, 2024).

The situation in Cuba began to change only after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, when Fidel Castro was forced to seek new partners, primarily in the economic sphere. Marcin F. Gawrycki describes it as follows: „The partial liberalisation of the economy prompted the European Union to cooperate with the island, thanks to which it very quickly became one of Cuba's most important partners. In 1991, the EU's share in Cuban trade was 11%, in 1992 – 22%, and in 1993 – 40%. Four of the five largest investors in Cuba during the period in question came from the Community: Spain, France, the United Kingdom and Italy” (Gawrycki, 2006, p. 235).

The European Union's relations with Cuba in the 1990s were primarily based on calls for change. An example of this is 1994, when the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the US administration to restore full economic, trade and financial relations with Cuba and calling on the Cuban government to introduce political changes to deepen democracy and increase respect for human rights. Two years later, EP resolutions reflected a desire to establish cooperation based on the democratisation of Cuba at all levels. In 2002, the European Parliament called on Cuba and the European Union to continue relations and resume political dialogue. In 2003, as emphasised in the literature by M. F. Gawrycki: „the favourable development of economic cooperation does not always translate into political contacts” (Gawrycki, 2006, p. 325). At that time, the European Parliament twice emphasised in its resolutions its condemnation of the Cuban authorities' actions violating civil rights and fundamental freedoms, especially against members of the Cuban opposition. Fidel Castro referred to them in July in Santiago de Chile, stating that „the Cuban people do not need the European Union to survive” and criticising the actions of European countries. At the same time, he rejected all aid offered by the EU on the grounds of preserving dignity (Gawrycki, 2006, p. 325).

In this article, the authors focus primarily on the year 2004. At that time, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the Cuban authorities to release all political prisoners and reiterating that the key objectives of the European Union remain: respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, encouragement of the transition to pluralistic democracy and sustainable economic recovery. It was then that

diplomatic relations warmed up, mainly due to the actions of the Spanish authorities. In analysing economic relations between the European Union and Cuba, the percentage share of Cuba's imports and exports should be verified. The years 1995–2005 were analysed to verify whether there were any significant changes in the period before and after the warming of diplomatic relations between the entities indicated.

Based on OEC World data showing Cuban exports to European Union member states, a relatively similar percentage share is visible in the years 1995–2005. The highest difference was 13.4% between 1996 and 1997. During this period, the European Parliament issued a resolution recognising that „dialogue between the EU and Cuba can have a positive impact on political and economic reforms, and that the European Union should support the democratisation process in Cuba at all levels” (Adamiszyn-Kontek, 2022, pp. 239–240). Accordingly, at the end of the same year, a number of measures were adopted to emphasise the importance of cooperation between the entities. „The EU's objective in its relations with Cuba was to support the transition to pluralist democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as to improve the living standards of the Cuban people. The EU wanted to be Cuba's partner in the gradual and irreversible opening up of the Cuban economy. Full cooperation with Cuba would depend on improvements in human rights and political freedoms. The EU will support progress towards democracy in Cuba and will examine the use of various means to this end, including intensifying political dialogue and cooperation and exploring the possibility of negotiating a cooperation agreement” (Adamiszyn-Kontek, 2022, p. 240). These examples may explain the significant difference in Cuba's exports in just one year. First and foremost, the Cuban authorities recognised the opportunities for economic development in their country at that time. Between 1998 and 2005, there was steady growth. In 2004, exports reached their highest level in the period under review. The main factors to be taken into account are the thaw in diplomatic relations, which led to an increase in Cuba's share of exports, and the subsequent enlargement of the European Union.

Between 1995 and 1998, Cuba recorded a high level of imports of goods from European Union Member States – over 40%. In 1999, when the European Parliament for the first time called on the Cuban authorities to release political prisoners in a resolution and to some extent imposed its values, imports fell by nearly 10%. Until 2003, they remained at over 35%. In 2004–2005, there was a further 10% decline due to the significant enlargement of the European Union and another call by the European Parliament in a resolution for the release of political prisoners, which was met with significant opposition from Fidel Castro.

In the next stage of their research, the authors focused on analysing 20 years of cooperation between the European Union and Cuba. As recently as 2012, one of the researchers describing the state of democracy and its future in Cuba pointed out that everything would depend on influential institutions – the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) and the Catholic Church. On this basis, Jorge Domínguez proposed three possible scenarios. In the first, a system similar to the current one, with the need for changes in the socialist economic system. „In the second, he predicts a future transformation of the system and Cuba, with a political system open to changes that will be introduced into the Political Constitution of the

Republic of Cuba, while retaining a significant part of the text, which is to be the mechanism that will bring about the change of the system. In such circumstances, the old authoritarianism will end, but the elements necessary for true democracy will not yet be introduced. In the third vision of the future, thinking about all the obstacles resulting from the current situation is abandoned and, in a sudden burst of magical realism, it is recognised that Cuba can be fully democratic" (Álvarez Araya, 2012, p. 73). Óscar Álvarez Araya saw that there were opportunities for democratic change in Cuba. In 2012, before the start of negotiations between the European Union and Cuba, these trends included, among others: „technological, economic, political and cultural globalisation, which is permeating Cuba; the global trend towards recognising the superiority of democracy; a global trend towards recognising the market economy; all democratic revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe – as an opportunity for change depending on the will of the people and the emergence of leaders among them; Samuel Huntington's third wave of democracy, well known from the literature on the subject" (Álvarez Araya, 2012, p. 75). At that time, the author stated that „if we place the factors that hinder or prevent change on one side of the scale and the trends favouring Cuba's opening up to a democratic system on the other, we can venture a cautious prediction that as the Castro brothers withdraw from the political scene, the chances for transformation on the island will increase, initially towards a market economy and then towards democracy" (Álvarez Araya, 2012, p. 75). So how did the social, political and economic situation in Cuba develop over the next 12 years?

Referring to 2004, when relations between the European Union and Cuba were cool and mainly concerned the economic dimension and support for economic development in Cuba, after 20 years the time had come to extend cooperation to the political dimension, in particular the democratisation of the country. At that time, an agreement on political dialogue and cooperation was signed, which was a breakthrough moment in the history of relations between these entities. After its signing, the then High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, confirmed that this was a turning point in relations with Cuba and that the time had come for a closer and more constructive partnership through economic and social support for the modernisation of Cuba, as well as the development of bilateral relations. The main objective of the PDCA is to establish a framework for dialogue and cooperation between the Cuban people and the Member States of the European Union. An analysis of the new chapter in EU-Cuba cooperation indicates that „the PDCA refers to a number of fundamental common principles in its preamble and Article 1. It begins with respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of the Republic of Cuba, followed by references to a commitment to effective multilateralism, universal human rights and the principles of democracy, good governance and the rule of law, as well as the promotion of international peace and security" (Thevad, 2024, pp. 12–15).

First and foremost, both parties to the agreement agree to engage in political dialogue, exchange views and cooperate. The dialogue should be based on discussions on civil and political rights, as well as economic and social rights. Cooperation is also to include the promotion of sustainable development in order to socially integrate Cuba into the 2030 Agenda. It is to be developed through „financial and technical

assistance, dialogue and exchange of views, as well as Cuba's participation in EU regional and thematic cooperation programmes and as an associated partner in EU framework programmes. The definition of cooperation entities includes civil society entities, including social organisations, trade unions and cooperatives, in addition to Cuban government institutions and local authorities, international organisations and development agencies of EU Member States" (Thevad, 2024, p. 14). The agreement also provides for the strengthening of democratic and human rights institutions and the legal and institutional framework.

In addition, cooperation activities relating to respect for the rule of law (including effective and democratic institutions) will be agreed under this agreement. The parties to the agreement have agreed to promote civil society participation in the formulation and implementation of cooperation activities. „Cooperation on social development and social cohesion may cover areas such as economic policies aimed at reducing inequalities; trade and investment policies; fair trade; and the development of rural and urban state and non-state enterprises. The PDCA also mentions the promotion of effective social policies and equitable access to social services for all, employment policies and more inclusive and comprehensive social protection systems" (Thevad, 2024, p. 16). The PDCA also aims to promote the equal participation of women in social, economic and, above all, political life. The European Union and Cuba are to focus their cooperation on promoting the active participation of young people in society and supporting youth organisations. The PDCA is intended to serve as a tool for promoting European values and interests, but also for facilitating economic reforms and creating democratic openness. The next step is to verify the economic changes between 2006 and 2022 among the entities selected for the study. At this point, particular attention should be paid to 2008, when Fidel Castro officially stepped down from power and handed it over to his brother Raúl Castro, who is widely regarded as more liberal.

Compared to 1995–2005, it is clear that exports did not increase in the following year, but rather fluctuated between growth and decline within a single year. The most difficult situation, apart from 2006 (16.9%), was in 2008 (21.5%). This was the time when Fidel Castro fell ill and, as a result, handed over power to his brother, which had a significant impact on Cuban exports to European Union member states. The highest results were recorded in 2013–2015, when the European Union began negotiations to conclude a PDCA agreement with Cuba. In the following years, after the agreement between the parties was signed, the economic situation began to change, with exports falling below 30% or rising slightly above 30%. It was only a year after the COVID-19 pandemic that Cuba's economic situation began to stabilise and return to the level of the best period studied. In order to explore this topic, the authors of the study will also verify imports in the same time frame.

There are three distinct periods in Cuba's share of imports to EU Member States. The first period is 2006–2015, when the results fluctuated around 30%. The second change took place in 2016–2018, when the results were the lowest. This period is similar to the lowest export results, i.e. at the time of the creation of the first agreement (PDCA) between the European Union and Cuba. The highest results in the history of relations between the entities were recorded in the third period – 2019–2022 (above 40%). Thus, it should be noted that the PDCA agreement concluded between these entities had pos-

itive economic effects, as assumed in its terms. These included the pursuit of sustainable development through: sustainable agriculture and food security, the environment (renewable energy, climate change) and economic and social modernisation (*European Union...*, 2024). From the outset of its relations with Cuba, the European Union has been keen to see political change, above all the democratisation of the country. It is therefore necessary to verify how the political situation has changed since 2004 and whether the words of one Latin American researcher have been confirmed, namely that the pursuit of democracy in this country is possible. Particular attention should be paid to the changes that have taken place in the Cuban parliament. From 2018 to 2023, this single chamber, then composed of 605 members of a single party – the Communist Party of Cuba – included 322 women, representing over 53% of the Cuban government. Thanks to these elections, in 2019, Cuba ranked second in the world in terms of women's participation in parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024).

Another visible change in Cuba's democratisation was the organisation of a referendum in 2022, in which citizens decided to legalise same-sex marriage. Almost 67% of voters supported this decision (turnout: 74%). In addition, the family code granted them the right to adopt children. „The 100-page new family code introduces many revolutionary changes in the area of equality, covering not only the protection of sexual minorities, but also other minorities, and extends the protection of victims of sexual violence, regulates the use of surrogates and increases the rights of grandparents to care for their grandchildren. [...] The situation began to change with the ageing of the generation of revolutionaries who had fought alongside Fidel Castro, who began to be replaced by a younger generation of Cuban communists” (Wolska, 2024a). Importantly, support for this referendum and the process in general came from Raúl Castro's daughter, Mariela Castro Espín. This is another step towards broader changes in Cuba.

The last parliamentary elections, which took place in March 2023, showed that democratic changes in Cuba are progressing. Once again, Cuba was ranked second on the Inter-Parliament list – of the current 470 seats in parliament, 262 are held by women, which is 55.7% (IPU Parline, 2024). The trend therefore remains upward. It is clear that these changes are very slow compared to other countries in the region, but it should be taken into account that the liberalisation of this country only really began after the Castro brothers, and above all Fidel Castro, left power. Presidential elections were also held in 2023, which were again won by Miguel Diaz-Canel. The president enjoys enormous support from those eligible to vote (only members of parliament from the Communist Party). „Diaz-Canel was born in 1960, a year after the Cuban revolution triumphed and Fidel Castro became prime minister for the first time. Although the current president represents the younger generation of Cuban communists, he is completely loyal to the Castro clan [...] The president has made a name for himself as a supporter of Cuba's economic opening, but without introducing democratisation – loosening its one-party system or internal policies in other areas. Instead, he has introduced a number of reforms of a social and ideological nature – for example, he has banned discrimination on the grounds of disability, gender, gender identity, race or sexual orientation” (Wolska, 2024b). He also limited presidential terms to just two. At the same time, even after the end of his second term – assuming, of course, that he steps down from the presidency – Diaz-Canel will not lose his influence on Cuban

politics. As the above example shows, social, cultural, economic and, above all, political changes are very slow. However, it should be noted that after many years, the authorities are becoming more liberal and solutions are gradually being introduced, not only European but also global ones.

These are only the beginnings of Cuba's democratisation, as the key element leading to complete transformation will be the exclusion of a single party from political life. Nevertheless, any liberalisation, even minimal, of a specific area (e.g. social) is stage II in the democratisation process (according to the definition of this concept). This is not a situation that allows for particular optimism, but the support of the European Union after the conclusion of the PDCA agreement is visible, particularly in economic and social terms. In the future, this may mean overcoming further milestones (table 1).

Table 1
The European Union's perspective on Republic of Cuba comparison 2004–2024

| 2004 | 2024 |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Strengthening ties only at the economic level. – Conducting calm but steadily growing trade. – Pointing out problems of inconsistency in values (power, human rights, repression of political opposition, political prisoners) and blocking cooperation on the part of the European Union. – Primarily humanitarian aid from the outset of relations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Closer cooperation, not only in economic terms, but also politically – the first agreement with Cuba in this regard, namely the PDCA. – Lack of trust in the actions of the Republic of Cuba in the area of human rights and labour rights – primarily in the wake of protests during the COVID-19 pandemic. – Gradual liberalisation of the ruling party's activities – e.g. referendums or women's participation in political life (impact of the PDCA agreement). |

Source: Own elaboration.

European Union – People's Republic of China (2004 and 2024)

The year 2004 in the history of the European Union is associated with the largest enlargement of the community in its entire history. In one year, or more precisely at one point in time, the Baltic states east of Germany were incorporated into the fastest growing international community (Raik, 2004, pp. 567–568). The European Union gained another relatively important area of Europe, separating it from Russia's sphere of influence, where President Vladimir Putin was strengthening his rôle (Morales, 2004, p. 9). The fact of the enlargement of the European community, as presented here, is only a starting point for addressing an issue of global importance, namely the strengthening of relations between the European Union and the People's Republic of China (Zhou, 2017, pp. 7–8). The year 2004 was officially declared the Year of China in the EU (Zhou, 2017, p. 7). To this end, exhibitions, business meetings and official summits between EU and Chinese representatives were organised (alternately in Beijing and Brussels). This marked 30 years of uninterrupted and extremely positive relations between the two entities (Shambaugh, 2004, p. 243). Against this backdrop, consideration began to be given to changing the way international communities were

built in a multilateral format, which was linked to the weakening of the role of the United States (Geeraerts, 2011, p. 58; Wallerstein, 2003, pp. 1–3).

The beginning of the 21st century in relations between the European Union and the People's Republic of China should be considered a good one (Shambaugh, 2004, pp. 243–244; Tang, 2005, p. 314). For the EU in particular, this was a time of clearly emphasising the importance of relations, but the PRC also took many steps to improve cooperation (Men, 2022, pp. 229–230). The European Union countries as a collective were the largest supplier of technology to China and a direct investor in (Politi, 2023, pp. 672–673; Van Der Harst, 2023, p. 413). These investments were part of a broader economic strategy, „economic diplomacy”. Cooperation was carried out on two further levels: political and military. Political strengthening took place through the organisation of the aforementioned regular visits and summits. At the military level, cooperation was less defined. Nevertheless, in European Union strategic documents created since (Morozowski, 2020) (and later, the relationship between the EU and the People's Republic of China was described as a strategic partnership. European Union (Barysch, Grant, Mark, 2005, p. 8; Rühlig, Bjorn, van Putten, Seaman, Otero-Iglesias, Ekman, 2018, p. 91). The set (Maher, 2016, pp. 959–960) was not consistent with the perspective adopted on the PRC (Politi, 2023, p. 686) Chinese (Communication..., 1995, p. 1b). On this basis, the European Commission formulated a number of doubts in its strategic documents.

The first is respect for human right (Communication..., 1995, p. 1b). In the wake of the events that took place between 26 April and 6 July 1989, better known as the Chinese student protests in Tiananmen Square, the Chinese Communist Party authorities, led by the first chairman, decided to use available military resources to suppress the protests, which were referred to as „riots” (Calhoun, 1989, p. 21). The protests were anti-government in nature, but above all peaceful (Calhoun, 1989, pp. 21–22). The students and other participants in the protests demanded the democratisation of public and, above all, political life, but also an end to corrupt practices (Calhoun, 1989, p. 22). The response from the authorities, apart from being negative, was above all disproportionate. During military operations, many protesters were killed (at least 10,000 people).⁴ As relations were strengthened and a multi-stage EU strategy towards China was developed, this event was seen as a potential threat of further human rights violations in the form of the use of available means of direct violence against Chinese citizens (Tang, 2005, p. 314). An additional concern was the limited regulation of workers' rights, but more importantly, the socialist nature of the state. Despite a significant global shift towards democratisation, China continued to function as a socialist republic with one-party rule (Narloch, 2013, p. 328).

The second clearly expressed concern was the PRC's military activity in the South China Sea and the potential threat of a military conflict with Taiwan, to which it claims sovereignty (Albert, 2016, p. 1; Tang, 2005, p. 315). The conflict in the Taiwan Strait between China and Taiwan over Taiwan's sovereignty has been ongoing since 1949.

⁴ Initial estimates presented by the PRC government indicated a lower number of victims (up to 2,700). Recent reports on the events in Tiananmen Square, related to the declassification of official notes made by British diplomats present in China at the time, indicate a much higher number – 10,000 victims.

Since the beginning of EU-China relations, this issue has been overlooked at the official level, especially after the introduction of the *One China Principle* in 1975. Nevertheless, when the first long-term strategies for EU-China relations were being developed, the issue of Taiwan was raised in a significant way. Until 2003, the European Union's website stated that the community recognised Taiwan as a „separate customs territory” but not as a sovereign state. Shortly afterwards, a change was made that directly addressed the need to highlight European interests in the region. The EU changed Taiwan's status to „economic and trading entity”. The failure to recognise Taiwan as a sovereign state in 2004 is evidence of the EU's clear shift towards China. However, the European Union has taken steps to minimise the potential for armed conflict between China and Taiwan and other similar conflicts in which the PRC would be a party. At the beginning of the 21st century, China worked to continuously rearm its army, expanding it with new, specialised units, a direction confirmed by the PRC Defence White Paper published in 2011 (Elak, Brysiak, Zygo, 2023, p. 160). The increased activity in this area since the beginning of the 21st century, as well as earlier, is evidenced, among other things, by the construction of military bases on islands under Chinese jurisdiction in the South China Sea, as well as continuous investments in medium- and long-range weapons (Swanstrom, 2005, p. 572). Another concern has also arisen in relation to armaments. As part of their long-term military policy and in response to events such as those in Tiananmen Square, the United States and EU Member States belonging to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) imposed an embargo on arms supplies and technological exchange with the PRC (Tang, 2005, p. 317). This embargo was a bone of contention, as the Chinese government lobbied for its lifting in the process of building EU-China relations (Tang, 2005, p. 319). It managed to convince representatives of countries that are important for European Union policy-making, namely France and Germany (and the United Kingdom) (Barysch, Grant, Leonard, 2005, p. 10). However, the changes resulting from the 2005 elections in both countries led to a shift in perspective on the embargo issue, which prevented a political consensus from being reached on the matter (Tang, 2005, p. 319).

Apart from the problems and doubts related to the development of EU-China relations since 1995, they began to intensify politically and socially. Three axes in particular operated in this context: tourism, education and politics (European Parliament, 2004). In terms of tourism, the aim was to increase tourist traffic between European countries and China. The target group for these efforts was primarily citizens of Asian countries. The activities were primarily intended to encourage Chinese citizens to take holidays and choose European countries as their destinations during the holiday seasons. The Chinese government, on the other hand, organised the aforementioned cultural events aimed at increasing the popularity of Chinese culture in European countries (Zhou, 2017, pp. 16–17). The sphere of education was also important for relations, including at the political level. With the implementation of the EU's long-term strategy towards China, a radical change took place. Universities and schools became open to accepting foreign students. In the case of China, European countries (mainly in Western Europe) accepted students from China (Zhou, 2017, p. 17). At the political level, there was to be an increasing degree of partnership in the economic and international areas.

Cooperation with China, apart from the benefits on which subsequent actions were based, indicated the certainty and good quality of relations between two growing entities of the new global order. The then President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi,⁵ stated that „if this is not a marriage, it is certainly a very serious commitment”⁶. This statement was a consequence of earlier EU decisions concerning strategic relations with the People’s Republic of China. The 1995 strategy, as the basic determinant of relations with the People’s Republic of China, apart from clearly defining the axis of cooperation, adopted three basic assumptions for EU-China cooperation. It referred to three levels: China’s involvement in global multilateral institutions, the intensification of bilateral interactions, and the expansion and improvement of China’s capabilities in terms of improving the quality of governance and the lives of its citizen (Communication..., 1995, pp. 3–7).

Despite high levels of engagement, tensions arose at these levels. These tensions were fundamental to the integration process. Although they were given the highest priority on the agenda, they were not clearly achieved or resolved. This is confirmed by the subsequent attitude of both parties towards each other. The first axis of conflict was linked to the dynamics of China’s development in relation to the rest of the world. This referred to the embargo imposed on China on the import and export of weapons and so-called defence technology (which in many cases can also take on a different character). This issue was raised by successive Chinese delegations (Tang, 2005, pp. 317–320). Despite reaching an agreement with certain EU countries, it was not possible to change or ease the embargo in terms of military policy-making by EU structures. Conducting extended cooperation (as evidenced, among other things, by the 20 China-EU committees and working groups delegated to make decisions and negotiate areas) China, as a state entity, was not satisfied with its current economic position (especially in terms of trade). By lobbying, in accordance with the principles of cooperation, for an increase in the scope of partnerships between EU Member States and China. Any slowdown, related, among other things, to integration processes and the creation of a common market, was treated by China as an act of bad faith on the part of the European Commission.

Relations between the European Union and China were multidimensional, covering social, economic and security issues. Human rights violations, especially against ethnic minorities (including the Uyghurs), and related migration problems remained a significant source of tension. The EU repeatedly called for the implementation of the standards of the 1948 *UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and for a more transparent internal policy. On the economic front, criticism focused on export dumping, the growing trade deficit and the incomplete implementation of World Trade Organisation rules. In the political and military sphere, the EU expressed its opposition to China’s actions towards Hong Kong and Taiwan, considering them a violation of the rule of law. Despite these reservations, EU-China relations reached a high point in 2004, based on the belief in the possibility of long-term economic cooperation and the gradual democratisation of the Chinese system.

⁵ President of the European Commission from 1999 to 2004. Italian economist and politician. Prime Minister of Italy from 2006 to 2008.

⁶ Original quote: *If it is not a marriage, it is at least a very serious engagement.*

Despite the tensions and problems mentioned above, relations between China and the European Union were becoming increasingly closer. This was due to a change in the perception of the world order based on the superior role of the United States as a hegemon (Wallerstein, 2003, p. 25) and the building of a special relationship (strategic partnership) between the EU and the PRC (Heiduk, 2024). The aim of both entities was to bring about a change in the structure of multilateral relations, which was facilitated by intensified efforts to build a global economy (Men, 2022, pp. 232–233; Shambaugh, 2004, p. 246; Wallerstein, 2003, p. 25). Due to its unquestionable international position, the European Union had great opportunities to build partnership relations with various international entities. The PRC, on the other hand, was treated as a country with high economic potential. This was confirmed by economic forecasts. Annual economic growth, combined with low labour costs and large manufacturing capacity, determined the need for the Community countries to continuously strengthen their activities in order to mark their position in China. (It was simply profitable.) China's role in the "post-Cold War" reality determined a change in the direction of building external relations. Thus, the United States, as the emanation of the West, lost its importance in favour of the previously inaccessible East. Another factor was the clearly defined conflict between the United States and the PRC. It concerned, among other things, the embargo on arms and defence systems for the People's Republic of China. Pursuing this policy based on growing conflict did not lead to an improvement in relations, quite the contrary (Tang, 2005, pp. 317–320). The dominance of the United States was historically and politically conditioned. In the 20th century, the US gained the title of hegemon, which was confirmed by its key role in all processes of shaping initial transnational cooperation, such as the United Nations (UN) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Within both of these bodies, the United States continuously gained an advantage over other countries, establishing its dominance in many areas. The perspective on the United States in the era of globalisation underwent a significant transformation.

China and the EU, as international entities separate from the US, were keen to change the way international politics was conducted (Shambaugh, 2004, p. 247). The main assumptions were global in nature. The entirety of relations, as postulated by the countries indicated, was to be based on multilateral relations between participants in political life. This measure was intended to have a positive impact on stabilisation efforts, which were mostly economic in nature, as evidenced by later Chinese initiatives, such as *the Belt and Road Initiative* (Politi, 2023, pp. 671–673; Jones, 2021, pp. 916–917). In this way, the basic axis of stabilisation of international relations was to be created, while at the same time changing the existing world order (in the face of the weakness of the United States) as cooperation between the European Union (treated as a whole) and the People's Republic of China (Men, 2022, p. 233), which increasingly emphasised the importance of a common view on global challenges, i.e. peace, defence and the environment (Shambaugh, 2004, p. 246). Due to the substantial reserves of raw materials and cheaper production conditions, a large number of (global) companies have relocated their factories and R&D (research and development) centres to China. This had clear advantages, especially in two dimensions. The first was international in nature, namely the growing importance of both the EU and Chi-

na as global powers. The second was directly related to the increase in consumption among European citizens, linked to the fact that they were being supplied with cheaper products.

Twenty years later, in 2024, relations between the European Union and China are still considered strategi (Albiñana, 2024, p. 43). For European Union countries in particular, China has become a manufacturing hub for many European companies of global importance. The relations themselves are undergoing a „recalibration” (Albiñana, 2024, pp. 43–44). There were several reasons for the change in attitude towards China, i.e. the COVID-19 pandemic, China’s unclear attitude towards Russia after the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, doubts about 5G technology, etc. These conditions are important in the process of building relations between the two entities. As noted by the authors of the report „EU-China relations: De-risking or de-coupling – the future of the EU strategy towards China” (2024), the above-mentioned elements constitute the general characteristics of the modern People’s Republic of China, they state that „one of the defining characteristics of the global environment in recent years is that China has become more assertive in its external behaviour and more authoritarian in its domestic policy” (Brinza et al., 2024, p. 1). This has determined the introduction of de-risking into the European Union’s economic policy.⁷

As already indicated by, the state of relations between the EU and China has been affected by the global SARS-COV-2 coronavirus pandemic (Politi, 2023, pp. 670–671). The Chinese government’s „Zero COVID” policy introduced for this reason involved, among other things, closing down businesses in the event of a single case of infection being detected among employees (*Protests...*, 2024). This primarily resulted in limited opportunities to fulfil contracts between economic entities (enterprises and states) for the supply of products covered by the contracts. As a result, a slowdown was noticeable in European companies dependent on Chinese entities, including global enterprises. Furthermore, the policy introduced became a pretext for restricting human rights, which was contrary to the European Union’s international policy objectives (Brinza et al., 2024, p. 34).

With regard to Russian aggression in Ukraine, China’s role is not clear-cut. According to the authors, it is based on two basic elements: overt and covert support for Russia and attempts to advocate for Russia while emphasising its own neutrality, with clear continuity of cooperation between them in cases such as their presence in the Arctic (Politi, 2023, p. 686). The European Union responded to this act of violence with sanctions. These sanctions have been repeatedly expanded, leading to partial independence, including from energy resources (mainly gas and coal) imported from Russia (Biba, 2023, p. 11). In addition to sanctions on energy resources, a set of measures was taken to significantly weaken the Russian Federation (RF) economically

⁷ The strategy of so-called “de-risking” cannot be literally translated into Polish. It encompasses a range of measures taken by the European Commission and individual EU Member States aimed at minimising the risks associated with the specific – as it has been presented – dimension of the strategic partnership with China. The measures indicated are the result of the variables mentioned (Covid, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the PRC’s related actions). These are preventive measures designed to strengthen the EU in crisis situations by ensuring the stability of the strategic dimensions of the European Community’s activities.

and financially. One of the few countries that did not explicitly condemn the RF, but also did not impose sanctions on it, was China (Brinza et al., 2024, p. 59). Unable to pursue further economic cooperation, Russia took steps to strengthen ties between the two countries. In doing so, China laid the foundations for a system of Russian dependence on its own economy (Brinza et al., 2024, p. 67). These actions, as well as the continuation of diplomatic relations, became another argument for European countries to minimise their efforts to expand their activities in the PRC. Advocacy activities, on the other hand, are part of efforts to restore Russia as a full participant in international relations. This takes place within the framework of the so-called *summit policy*,⁸ where China lobbies for a change in European countries' attitudes towards Russia during organised summits. The same happens during bilateral diplomatic visits. Importantly, in the eyes of public opinion, the PRC emphasises its neutrality. However, this is merely a facade, as confirmed by statements made by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who, expressing his readiness to engage in peace talks with Ukraine, pointed to China as one of three countries that could act as mediators.⁹ The Russian Federation's designation of the PRC as a country that can play this role raises additional doubts about China's ambiguous position in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.¹⁰

The most important element in the European Union's changing perception of China is the diagnosis related to China's high level of dependence in terms of shaping the European economy and pursuing the so-called „green transition.” China's involvement has been associated with a weakening of supply chain stability, security, and the defence of values and stability, as well as technological stability (Brinza et al., 2024, p. 59). In view of these challenges, Ursula von der Leyen has announced a de-risking approach towards China. This strategy, introduced at EU level, is intended to be a fundamental countermeasure to the development of economic dependencies. It is a continuation of the trend announced by the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), Olaf Scholz, and referred to as *Zeitenwende*, or turning point¹¹. The EU's actions in this process include the introduction of an extensive method of verifying foreign direct investment (FDI) by Chinese companies and measures to reduce imports of Chinese products (electric cars, components essential for building renewable energy systems, etc.). The latest development indicating an intensification of activities in this area is the recent introduction of high tariffs on electric cars manufactured in China. However, there is no clear consensus among EU Member States. The main opponent is Germany, as mentioned above. In recent years, global German companies, mainly from the automotive and chemical industries, have built up deep dependencies on the Chinese market, locating their factories and, more importantly, their R&D (research & development) branches there. Thus, the tariffs in question may have a negative impact on Sino-German economic relations. Germany is not the only example

⁸ Peak politics.

⁹ Apart from China, the list includes countries such as Brazil and India, which belong to the BRICS group, an alternative to the European Union, especially in economic terms.

¹⁰ Analyses conducted by [...] indicate trust as the most important value in the process of building contemporary relations between entities in international relations. From a normative perspective, analyses of this type seem to be emotional in nature.

¹¹ Communication on the speech and quote.

in this regard. The **de-risking** strategy introduced by the European Commission aims to promote independence and build new economic relations, while paying attention to increasingly prominent values.

However, it should be noted that the process of changing the European Union's perception of China is not only due to the reasons outlined above. The change in perception is marked by a phrase that appeared in the European Commission's strategic vision on cooperation with the PRC in March 2019, namely "systemic rival." The document was made public, which means that it was the basic reference point for the analysis of EU-China relations, but also for the actions resulting from them. The characteristics of the actions are as follows: „delivering a further EU policy shift towards a more realistic, assertive, and multi-faceted approach." The document contains 10 actions determining the EU's actions towards China (Morozowski, 2020, pp. 49–50). Most of them focus on economic and technological issues, but there is also room for issues directly related to human rights and labour rights. Thus, the EU has once again confirmed, this time directly, the importance of its values as an element conducive to building international relations. At the same time, the document confirmed a clear change in attitude towards China. It has gone from being a partner to a rival (Morozowski, 2020, p. 50). In this regard, Chinese diplomacy is trying to change the narrative. Nevertheless, the recent actions of the European Commission regarding the import of electric cars and the toughening of rhetoric towards China clearly demonstrate a change in the attitude of the EU as a community of states towards the PRC. Not all Member States identify with the European Commission's policy towards China (Levy, Revesz, 2022, p. 458). They are lobbying for *the status quo* in relations with the PRC to be maintained. This state of affairs demonstrates the political weakness of the European Union in implementing its security objectives. An example of this is the recent decision to raise tariffs on electric cars imported from China. Representatives of the German government, led by the Chancellor, called for the existing import conditions to be maintained. In doing so, they introduced a significant discord in the discussion on ways to reduce the risk of dependence on China, while at the same time revealing their weaknesses in this area in the form of significant dependence on entities and production centers in China (table 2).

Table 2
The European Union's perspective on People's Republic of China – comparison 2004–2024

| 2004 | 2024 |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Strengthening economic and political ties. – Advocating for the inclusion of the PRC in transnational political and economic organisations (WTO). – Conducting dynamically growing trade. – Building a political base for cooperations (committees, councils, etc.) – Pointing out inconsistencies in values (human rights, labour rights, economic activity) without the threat of sanctions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – „De-risking" reducing the European economy's dependence on Chinese economic entities – Lack of trust in China's actions in the area of human rights and labour rights, based on the „Zero-Covid" policy introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic – Introduction of an expanded pool of options for controlling investments and business activities of entities from China (and elsewhere) in the form of FDI (<i>foreign direct investment</i>) controls. Noticeable increase in the number of control processes. |

Source: Own elaboration.

Conclusions

The above considerations reveal fundamental differences in the development of relations between the EU and China and between the EU and Cuba, which we present in the tables below, which aim to compare the European Union's perspectives and actions directly related to these relations. The authors believe that the perspective of 2004 is important for understanding the standard of international relations at the beginning of the 21st century. A significant tendency to build a broadly understood European "welfare state" had a positive impact on the shape of economically beneficial relations. Thus, the People's Republic of China was the primary focus of the European Union's efforts. It was also a period of minimising the influence of values. The example of the lack of recognition of Taiwan's sovereignty and the failure to introduce broader sanctions resulting from the PRC's failure to comply with the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948) confirm the direction of building relations based on the principle of "non-value based partnerships." The democratic values indicated in the European Commission's strategic documents had a distinctive dimension, i.e. they emphasised the difference between the partners. This comparison clearly confirms the differences in the process of building relations between the European Union and China and Cuba between 2004 and 2024. At the same time, it points to a change in the perception of these relations.

As a result of the study indicated in the title of the issue, the following conclusions can be drawn: the external activities of the European Union have changed in nature over time. The globalisation processes present at the beginning of the 21st century determined the economic nature of the relations. In 2024, however, we are seeing a change in the way the Union builds its external relations, with an emphasis on democratic values. In the case of the Republic of Cuba, we are seeing a significant positive change, expressed, among other things, in greater citizen participation in public life. The same factors also determined the *negative* perception of the People's Republic of China. This hypothesis has thus been confirmed. It can therefore be observed that, over the course of two decades, the European Union has applied stricter conditionality and criticism towards small countries of economic importance and greater pragmatism and restraint towards key partners, i.e. China.

Furthermore, in the case of the EU, economic issues continue to determine the way in which external relations are built. Therefore, despite emphasising the importance of a normative approach, the EU does not decide to take drastic measures, such as ceasing cooperation by introducing a 'disengagement' strategy, i.e. a dynamic withdrawal, but introduces the principle of 'risk reduction', i.e. minimising its presence based on the principle of building the region's economic independence from the above-mentioned countries. This principle largely applies to the EU's policy towards China, but its implications can also be observed in the context of building relations with the Republic of Cuba. This means, from the authors' point of view, that despite emphasising the importance of democratic values, they do not constitute the basis for building relations. The hypothesis has therefore been partially confirmed. The partial nature refers primarily to the asymmetry between EU policy towards China and Cuba, which, from a general perspective, refers to the European Union's lack of excessive interference in internal affairs in order to maintain good economic relations. The EU achieves greater

influence on political change in non-democratic countries when it offers significant incentives (e.g. economic benefits). However, in the absence of such incentives, the level of democratisation is negligible. Over the past two decades, the nature of relations between the EU and non-democratic countries has changed. From being pragmatic and focused on economic issues, they have become more normative, which is seen as the realisation of the paradigm of Europe's normative power and the safeguarding of interests in partnership with countries with similar values. As a result, the indicators and areas of comparison have changed between 2004 and 2024. The example of relations between the European Union and Cuba or China shows that pragmatic, economy-oriented external relations predominate. Despite a stronger emphasis on the normative dimension, confirmed by the emergence of the category of 'value-based partnerships', this is not the ultimate way to build relations with partners, even undemocratic ones. The considerations presented do not contribute a new theoretical approach to the analysis of EU external policy. The authors have proposed a deeper approach to the empirical dimension as an entity that balances between axiology and pragmatism in action. In this sense, the article illustrates the processes of economisation of the EU's foreign policy, understood as the growing subordination of normative goals to the economy, as opposed to declared normative policies.

Bibliography

Adamiszyn-Kontek A. (2022), *European Union relations with Cuba in 2008–2022 – the aspect of democratization*, Poznań.

Agh A. (1998), *Emerging Democracies in East Central Europe and the Balkans*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.

Albiñana J. T. (2024), *Status and Prospects of EU–China Relations*, in: *The Future of China's Development and Globalization*, eds. H. H. Wang, M. L. Miao, Singapour.

Álvarez Araya Ó. (2012), *The future of democracy in Cuba*, Latin America. Analytical and informational quarterly, Warsaw.

Albert E. (2016), *China-Taiwan Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations.

Blumenau B. (2022), *Breaking with Convention? Zeitenwende and the Traditional Pillars of German Foreign Policy*, "International Affairs", 98(6).

Brinza A., Berzina-Cernkova U. A., Le Corre P., Seaman J., Turcsanyi R., Vladisavljev S. (2024), *Study EU-China relations: De-risking or de-coupling – the future of the EU strategy towards China*, Directorate-General for External Policies, Brussels.

Britannica (2024), *Fidel Castro*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Fidel-Castro>, 15 September 2024.

Bulmer S., Burch M. (1998), *Organising for Europe: Whitehall, the British State and The European Union*, "Public Administration", 76.

Business Insider (2024), *Protests in China. What is the zero Covid policy?*, <https://businessinsider.com.pl/wiadomosci/protesty-w-chinach-na-czym-polega-polityka-zero-covid/v7n6hdt>, 27 September 2024.

Calhoun C. (1989), *Revolution and the Repression in Tiananmen Square*, "Society", 26(6).

Communication from the Commission (1995), *A long-term policy for China-Europe relations*, Brussels.

Diamond L. (1999), *Developing Democracy. Toward Consolidation*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore–London.

Dobek-Ostrowska B. (1996), *Spain and Poland: political elites in the transition to democracy. A comparative analysis*, Wrocław University Press, Wrocław.

Dahl R. A. (1998), *On Democracy*, Yale University Press, doi:10.2307/j.ctv18zhcs4.

Damro C. (2012), *Market power Europe*, "Journal of European Public Policy", 19(5), pp. 682–699, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2011.646779>.

EEAS (n.d.), *EU-Cuba relations: factsheet*, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/cuba_factsheet_revised.pdf, 15 September 2024.

Elak L., Brysiak K., Zygo K. (2023), *China as a contender for hegemony in the 21st century*, "De Securitate et Defensione. On Security and Defence", 9(2).

European Parliament (2004), *The EU's relations with China*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/fd/d-ch2004092803/d-ch2004092803en.pdf, 22 September 2024.

European Union External Action, *EU-Cuba relations, factsheet* (2024), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/cuba_factsheet_revised.pdf, 21 September 2024.

Freedom House (2024), *Countries and Territories*, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/scores>, 30.08.2024.

Gawrycki M. F. (2006), *Foreign policy of Latin American countries*, Warsaw.

Geeraerts G. (2011), *China, the EU, and the New Multipolarity*, "European Review", 19(1).

Heiduk F. (2024), *Germany's value-based partnerships in the Indo-Pacific*, "SWP Research Paper" 4.

Hyde-Price A. (2006), *Normative Power Europe: A Realist Critique*, "Journal of European Public Policy", 13, doi:10.1080/13501760500451634.

Youngs R. (2010), *The European Union and Democracy Promotion: A Critical Global Assessment*, 1st ed., The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, ISBN-13: 978-0-8018-9732-0.

Inter-Parliamentary Union (2024), *Women in national parliaments*, <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>, 18 September 2024.

IPU Parline (2024), *Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments*, https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking/?date_year=2024&date_month=09, 19 September 2024.

Jones C. (2021), *Understanding the Belt and Road Initiative in EU-China Relations*, "Journal of European Integration", 43(7).

Levy K., Revesz A. (2022), *No Common Ground: A Spatial-Relational Analysis of EU-China Relations*, "Journal of Chinese Political Science", 27(3).

Maher R. (2016), *The elusive EU-China strategic partnership*, "International Affairs", 92(4).

Maliflet K. (2006), *Concepts of statehood on the European stage: a turning point?*, in: *EU policy towards Ukraine: partnership or membership?*, ed. A. Podraza, Lublin.

Manners I. (2002), *Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?*, JCMS, 40(2).

Men J. (2022), *The EU and China: talk to each other or talk across each other*, "Asia Europe Journal", 20(3).

Morawski W. (1998), *Institutional Change. Society. Economy. Politics*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw.

Morales J. (2004), *Who rules Russia today? An analysis of Vladimir Putin and his political project (II)*, Revista UNISCI, 4.

Morozowski T. (2020), *Don't Make a Rival Out of the Dragon: Rethinking the EU-China Policy*, "The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies".

Narloch S. (2013), *China's superpower aspirations and democratisation*, "National Security Studies", 3.

Politi A. (2023), *The paradigm-shift in EU-China relations and the limits of the EU's current strategy towards China: A Relational Perspective*, "Asian Affairs", 54(4).

Raik K. (2004), *EU Accession of Central and Eastern European Countries: Democracy and Integration as Conflicting Logics*, “East European Politics and Societies”, 18(4).

Ruszkowski J. (2019), *Europeanisation. Analysis of the impact of the European Union*, Warsaw.

Rühlig T., Bjorn J., van Putten F.-P., Seaman J., Otero-Iglesias M., Ekman A. (2018), *Political values in Europe-China relations*, Utrikespolitiska Institutet, Stockholm.

Rustow D. (1970), *Transition to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model*, “Comparative Politics”, 3.

Shambaugh D. (2004), *China and Europe: The emerging axis*, “Current History”, 103(674).

Statista, *The Statistics Portal for Market Data, Market Research and Market Studies*, <https://www.statista.com/?srsltid=AfmBOopPIDEa2vRnDAiv7fEtY3BJyV1o3iiwd5oZ9AYII9HFmSA-n5OKZ>, 30.08.2024.

Swanstrom N. (2005), *China and Central Asia: A new Great Game or traditional vassal relations?*, “Journal of Contemporary China”, 14(45).

Tang S. C. (2005), *The EU's policy towards China and the arms embargo*, “Asia Europe Journal”, 3(3).

Thevad J. (2024), *EU-Cuba relations: a new chapter begins*, https://intranet.eulacfoundation.org/en/system/files/eu_cuba_0.pdf, 13 September 2024.

Van Der Harst J. (2023), *The European Commission and the “Europeanisation” of EU trade diplomacy: the case of EU-China relations, 1999–2021*, “Asia Europe Journal”, 21(3).

Wach K. (2016), *Europeanisation: its definition, research approaches and dimensions*, in: *Macro, Meso- and Microeconomic Dimensions of Europeanisation*, eds. P. Stanek, K. Wach, Warsaw.

Wallerstein I. (2003), *US Weakness and the Struggle for Hegemony*, “Monthly Review”, 55(3).

Wolska A. (2024a), *Cuba: Miguel Diaz-Canel re-elected president*, Euroactiv.pl, <https://www.euractiv.pl/section/demokracja/news/kuba-diaz-canel-ponownie-prezydentem-kuby/>, 21 September 2024.

Wolska A. (2024b), *Cuba: Referendum decides to legalise same-sex marriage*, Euroactiv.pl, <https://www.euractiv.pl/section/demokracja/news/kuba-w-referendum-zadecydowano-o-legalizacji-jednopłciowych-małżeństw/>, 22 September 2024.

Zhou H. (2017), *An Overview of the China-EU Strategic Partnership (2003–2013)*, in: *China-EU Relations: Reassessing the China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership*, Singapore.

Zielonka J. (2006), *Europe as Empire. The Nature of the Enlarged European Union*, 1st edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Zielonka J. (2008), *Europe as a global actor: Empire by example?*, “International Affairs”, 84(3), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2008.00718.x>.

Summary

The European Union's external relations are an important issue in the context of the contemporary principles and functioning of the European community. In this article, the authors analyse a specific type of relationship between the European Union and non-democratic countries, i.e. the Republic of Cuba and the People's Republic of China, based on determinants related to the concepts of democratisation, Europeanisation ad extra and *value-based partnerships*. The state of relations between these entities in 2004 and 2024 is presented. The differences that determined the European Union's perception of these countries are highlighted. As part of the comparative analysis, the authors summarise the clear change in the European Commission's policy shaping relations between these partners based on a cognitive framework and political, economic and normative issues. It was also observed that, apart from the established bilateral partnerships between the EU and China and Cuba, the countries in question have also revitalised relations between themselves. The authors point out that despite the earlier assumption of the importance of values in the context of building partnerships (based on strategic documents),

in practical terms, democratic values are still not a determining factor in these relations. Economic issues continue to be the fundamental dimension of building relations.

Key words: democratisation, Europeanisation, EU external relations, European Union, Republic of Cuba, People's Republic of China

Relacje Unii Europejskiej z państwami niedemokratycznymi: przypadek Republiki Kuby i Chińskiej Republiki Ludowej. Perspektywa porównawcza – 2004 i 2024

Streszczenie

Relacje zewnętrzne Unii Europejskiej są istotnym zagadnieniem w perspektywie współczesnych założeń i zasad funkcjonowania wspólnoty europejskiej. Autorzy w ramach niniejszego artykułu podejmują analizę szczególnego typu relacji Unii Europejskiej z państwami nie-demokratycznymi, tj. z Republiką Kuby i Chińską Republiką Ludową w oparciu o wyznaczniki związane z pojęciami demokratyzacji, europeizacji *ad extra* i *value based partnerships*. Przedstawiony został stan relacji pomiędzy tymi podmiotami na rok 2004 i 2024. Ukażane zostały różnice, które zdeterminowały sposób postrzegania wskazanych państw przez Unię Europejską. W ramach przeprowadzonej komparatystyki, autorzy syntetycznie przedstawiają wyraźną zmianę prowadzonej przez Komisję Europejską polityki kształtującej relacje pomiędzy tymi partnerami w oparciu o ramę poznawczą oraz kwestie polityczne, ekonomiczne i normatywne. Zaobserwowano również, że poza wykształconymi partnerstwami o charakterze bilateralnym pomiędzy UE a Chinami i Kubą wskazane państwa zdynamizowały relacje także między sobą. Autorzy zwracają uwagę na to, że mimo wcześniejszego założenia istotności wartości w kontekście budowania partnerstw (w oparciu o dokumenty strategiczne), w ujęciu praktycznym wartości demokratyczne nadal nie są determinantem tych relacji. Kwestie ekonomiczne nadal stanowią podstawowy wymiar budowania relacji.

Slowa kluczowe: demokratyzacja, europeizacja, relacje zewnętrzne UE, Unia Europejska, Republika Kuby, Chińska Republika Ludowa

Author Contributions

Conceptualization (Konceptualizacja): Aleksandra Adamiszyn-Kontek, Mikołaj Sokolski

Data curation (Zestawienie danych): Aleksandra Adamiszyn-Kontek, Mikołaj Sokolski

Formal analysis (Analiza formalna): Aleksandra Adamiszyn-Kontek, Mikołaj Sokolski

Writing – original draft (Piśmiennictwo – oryginalny projekt): Aleksandra Adamiszyn-Kontek, Mikołaj Sokolski

Writing – review & editing (Piśmiennictwo – sprawdzenie i edytowanie): Aleksandra Adamiszyn-Kontek, Mikołaj Sokolski

Competing interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist (Sprzeczne interesy: Autor oświadczył, że nie istnieją żadne sprzeczne interesy): Aleksandra Adamiszyn-Kontek, Mikołaj Sokolski

Article submitted: 31.07.2025; article accepted: 06.08.2025.

Data przekazania tekstu: 31.07.2025; data zaakceptowania tekstu: 06.08.2025.