

From the Perspective of “Hedging” to “Soft Balance”: The Remaking of EU-China Policy (2013-2023)

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Abstract

This article primarily discusses the evolving EU-China policy between 2013 and 2023 and highlights key shifts in its approach: in 2013, the EU-China marked the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the “Comprehensive Partnership,” coinciding with China’s advancement of the “Belt and Road Initiative.” The EU adopted a hedging strategy towards China—economic engagement undertaken in hope that close economic ties would encourage political reforms in China; post-2019, the EU stated viewing China as a cooperation “partner,” an economic “competitor,” and a systemic “rival.” The EU began to recognize the expansionist political program behind China’s economic interests. At this point, the EU’s policy shifted towards a soft balancing. The bilateral relationship revealed a balance that excluded direct military confrontation but opted for cooperation or opposition on soft issues, which constitutes the basic concept of “soft balance” in this context.

Key Words: hedging, soft balance, strategic triangle, EU and China, EU-China-US