

Introduction

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Strategic partnership is surely not a new form of cooperation in the international arena; however, until today research has focused mainly on relations between states, rarely investigating other actors of international relations (IR). In light of this, the members of the research team Strategic Partnership Group (SPG) embarked on an analysis of strategic partnerships between states and international organizations – the main types of actors in the contemporary international system. To this aim, an ideal model of strategic partnership has been devised, verified and validated.

The turn of the century brought a new era in international relations. The collapse of the post-war world order and the end of the Cold War combined with ongoing globalization processes gave rise to the substantial expansion of a network of interdependencies in global politics. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the bipolar bloc system, states regained the sovereign capability of defining and defending strategic goals, i.e. the autonomous choice of partners and allies. One of multiple structural and material effects of globalization on contemporary international relations was considerable broadening of the selection of potential allies and partners. Nowadays it encompasses not only states but also a variety of international organizations and corporations. Considering their competence to conclude legally binding agreements and take autonomous actions, it is no accident that intergovernmental and supranational organizations have become oft-chosen partners. Amid uncertainty, economic crisis and multicausal networks of dependencies, international politics offers as many cooperation possibilities as limitations, and thus poses a challenge to actions of both state and non-state international players. Foreign policy needed new tools to mitigate the effects of the changing international environment, increasing risk and intensifying conflicts of interests, and the answer was strategic partnerships.

One of the concepts most frequently referred to in debates on foreign policy, strategic partnership, paradoxically is also one of the notions most

frequently misunderstood in political and academic discourse. Despite the popularity of this foreign policy instrument, the current knowledge of strategic partnerships between states and international organizations seems to be incomplete. Strategic partnership is one of the most modern forms of relationships between IR actors, and understandably raises interest among scholars all over the world. However, until today this concept has not been clearly defined – most often the research has focused on specific case studies, and the results lacked deeper theoretical and methodological reflection on the essence of the phenomenon itself. What may serve here as an example is the predominantly empirical research concerning the European Union's foreign policy and its strategic partnerships, conducted by European scientific centres, such as the Spanish think tank FRIDE (*Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior*) and the German SWP (*Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*) as well as the studies conducted by the ESPO (the European Strategic Partnerships Observatory – a joint project of FRIDE and EGMONT (The Royal Institute for International Relations)), the FNSR (the Foundation for National Security Research) and individual researchers.

An exception here is the conceptual framework offered by Thomas D. Wilkins within the organizational analytical model of strategic partnerships (*Russo-Chinese Strategic Partnership: A New Form of Security Cooperation?*, 2008). Another one is the list of six important features of a strategic partnership presented by Vidya Nadkarni (*Strategic Partnerships in Asia: Balancing without Alliances*, 2010), further developed by Thomas Renard (*The EU and its Strategic Partners: A Critical Assessment of the EU's Strategic Partnerships*, 2013) and Giovanni Grevi (*The EU Strategic Partnerships: Process and Purposes*, 2013) as well as the list of five features of a strategic partnership by Jonathan Holslag (*The Elusive Axis: Assessing the EU–China Strategic Partnership*, 2011). Important contribution was made also by Luis Fernando de Morales y Blanco (*On the Uses and Functions of 'Strategic Partnership'*, 2015; *The Functions of 'Strategic Partnership' in European Union Foreign Policy Discourse*, 2016). The basic sets of characteristic features of SP were also presented in non-English literature by Igor Zhovkva (*Strategichne partnerstvo u zovnishniy polityci Ukrainy*, 2006), Rogério de Souza Farias (*Parcerias estratégicas: marco conceitual*, 2013) and Lucyna Czechowska (*Wewnątrzunijni partnerzy strategiczni Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej*, 2013).

Strategic partnership between a state and an international organization is a special kind of explicitly stated strategic cooperation based on trust, which is expressed through deepening the process of mutual understanding and respect. Strategic partnership should be also conditioned by cooperation willingness, determined by convergent strategic goals and

roles. Cooperation sustainability is also an important matter, particularly as it implicates potential resistance to internal and external challenges as well as the ability to undertake joint activities. Cooperation in the face of challenges should be facilitated by positive unique bonds, such as shared experiences and common values, as well as elements of regularized bilateral strategic interactionism including frequent and regular meetings and established mechanisms of settling disputes. A partnership designed in such a way has a chance to survive and function effectively.

This book is the capstone of a research project that was guided by two research goals. In the theoretical dimension, the goal was to build and present an ideal model of strategic partnership between a state and an international organization, which included a definition of this concept together with a set of its constitutive features. In the empirical dimension, the goal was to establish an analytical pattern – a tool allowing the assessment of quality of specific strategic partnerships present in the international arena – as well as to test it with changes empirically observed in 14 case studies of strategic partnerships.

The project proposed the following hypotheses:

- H₁: The relationship between partners is characterized by mutual trust.*
- H₂: The more converging the actors' strategic goals, the greater their willingness for cooperation.*
- H₃: The more converging the actors' strategic roles, the greater their willingness for cooperation.*
- H₄: The more positive the unique bonds between the partners, the more sustainable their strategic cooperation.*
- H₅: The more regular and intensive the partners' foreign–political interactions, the more sustainable their strategic cooperation.*

As strategic partnerships do not fully fit into any dominant approach in the theory of international relations, the project's theoretical perspective mainly integrates postulates of two influential IR paradigms: realism and constructivism. The perspective is based on the assumption that the structure of the international system is anarchic, unstable and multi-vector, and its main and equivalent actors (who are, by nature, not prone to either cooperational or confrontational behaviours) are both states and international organizations. Based on functioning of players in the international arena, and more precisely their tendencies to enter into competition or cooperation, the project included a specific synthesis of realism and constructivism.

Realism as a paradigm of international relations assumes that in the international arena the players compete with each other due to their

egoistic aspirations to promote their own interests and to search for the balance of power or threat. The failing of this approach can lie in underestimating the role of alliances and international organizations and overestimating the notion of survival as well as in scepticism towards the promise of international cooperation. However, a state's interest is not defined solely by *raison d'état*, but also by prestige in the international arena and the citizens' prosperity. In turn, constructivism is an approach whose founders pay great attention to issues related to identity, norms, rules, principles and routinizing and regularizing practices in mutual relations. The consequence of implementing a paradigm comprising so many social factors is recognition of the actors' image and reputation as important factors that shape their position in the international arena. Constructivism also assumes that routinization and acting according to established norms and rules can decrease anarchy in the international system. Adopting the realist-constructivist perspective, the project understands strategic partnership as a tool in bilateral diplomacy and – more broadly – as a form of diplomatic engagement in international issues. Therefore, an assumption was adopted that strategic partnerships emerge from individual – and thus competitive and broadly understood – interests and that they (partnerships) are established to achieve mutual benefits through building sufficiently predictable patterns of international cooperation and competition.

This research project aims to fill the gap existing in the literature on strategic partnerships. Its broad context involves distinguishing empirical features observed in the conducted comparative research as well as facilitating and establishing an appropriate analytical framework. The structure of the publication resembles the course of the research process. The book is divided into three main parts: Part I includes theoretical and methodological assumptions of the project, Part II provides the detailed description of an ideal model of strategic partnership, and Part III presents the results of empirical research. Part I contains a description of theoretical assumptions underpinning the phenomenon of strategic partnerships and their context within the theory of international relations. The focus here is on the initial assumptions of the project, on the methodology and on the broad context that systematizes current knowledge and state of the art related to the concept of strategic partnership. Part II presents a full description of the ideal model of strategic partnership and its elements – trust between partners, cooperation willingness, convergence of strategic goals and roles, cooperation sustainability, unique bonds and regularized bilateral strategic interactionism – as well as the research methods and techniques. Part III includes analyses of selected strategic partnerships between states and international organizations: NATO (Russia, Japan,

Ukraine), the European Union (the United States, India, Japan and Georgia), ASEAN (China, Canada, Australia and New Zealand), and the CAN (China, Brazil and Chile). The publication ends with a two-part conclusion. The first part presents the results of comparative analysis of all the 14 case studies and highlights general tendencies and deviations. The second part provides conclusions regarding theoretical assumptions based on the results of statistical analyses and the revised version of the analytical model.

Within the framework of scientific research, the team gathered a broad scope of data, which the reader may find useful for verifying the research process or for further studies. Due to size limitations, the complete set of data is available in the repository on the SPG website, www.spg.umk.pl/datasets. The data include annexes with the lists of official bilateral meetings held between the partners, studies on convergence of strategic goals and roles (separately for each case study) and lists of partners' bilateral manifestos signed during the period of their strategic partnerships. The repository has also a file with overall tables of indicators for individual hypotheses together with their visualization to facilitate picturing and comparing the results obtained for the same indicator in all the analysed cases.

The project presented in this book was carried out by a group of young scientists associated with the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. The Head of the Strategic Partnership Group and the principal investigator was Lucyna Czechowska. The members who formed the group from its beginning were Agata Domachowska, Karolina Gawron-Tabor, Joanna Piechowiak-Lamparska and Andriy Tyushka. Piotr Pięta, Bartosz Płotka and Bartłomiej Różycki joined the group at a later stage. Within the framework of the Group, its members did research internships, for example at the Elliot School of International Affairs at George Washington University and at Secretaría General de la Comunidad Andina; they also participated in international scientific conferences. The information about the Group's achievements and other details can be found on the SPG website www.spg.umk.pl.

The project Strategic Partnership between a State and an International Organization: An Ideal Model was financed under the National Science Centre within the SONATA 6 scheme (grant no. UMO-2013/11/D/HS5/01260) and in 2014–18 was carried out at the Faculty of Political Sciences and International Studies at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.

The authors express their sincere gratitude to the reviewers: Marcin Grabowski, Matúš Halás, Sławomir Postek, Radosław Potorski, Anna Ratke-Majewska and Agata Włodkowska-Bagan for their very helpful

comments, which resulted in many beneficial changes and corrections. We also owe gratitude to a number of academics and policy analysts who rendered their expertise and advice on the project's theoretical assumptions and individual case studies, including Maria Ochwat and Michał Drgas, who contributed to this collective endeavour in the early stages of the project.