



NATIONAL SCIENCE CENTRE
POLAND



Strategic Partnership between a State and an International Organization:

An Ideal Model

“SPaSIO”

RESEARCH PROJECT OUTLINE



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Strategic Partnership between a State and an International Organization: An Ideal Model	
Project Title	<i>Model idealny partnerstwa strategicznego pomiędzy państwem a organizacją międzynarodową</i>
(Acronym)	“SPaSIO”
Starting date	Duration in months
1st August 2014	36
Funding	National Science Centre (Narodowe Centrum Nauki) Grant no. UMO-2013/11/D/HS5/01260 (“SONATA 6”)
Project Host Institution	Nicolaus Copernicus University of Toruń (UMK) Faculty of Political Science and International Studies
Key words	strategic partnerships, sustainable cooperation, states, international organizations, linkage, regularized bilateral intergovernmentalism, partnership reliability, resilience
Executive Summary	
<p>In less than two previous decades, ‘strategic partnerships’ has become a marketable term and genuine currency of international politics let alone the incrementally globalizing international economy wherefrom the term originates. The proliferation of ‘strategic partnerships’ in international relations has greatly diffused and, at the same time, devalued the concept, which still lacks a stringent operational definition. A salient and ever-growing number of ‘strategic partnerships’ not only between states, but also – from quite recently – between states and other international actors, predominantly international organizations, can be observed worldwide. Along with the European Union, which may be legitimately seen as a ‘poster child’ of international organization’s ‘strategic partnerships’, the bonds of strategic cooperation and partnership are linking states with international organizations that span all over the continents. The Andean Community, African Union, ASEAN, NATO, MERCOSUR, OSCE, and other strategically relevant international players have succeeded in developing their own ‘strategic partnerships’ networks of incremental density.</p> <p>Despite such a widespread proliferation of ‘strategic partnerships’ in the international system marked by power shifts and emerging multinodality, the term remains one of the most ill-defined concepts in political science and international relations. Given the rising relevance of the term in state foreign policy vocabulary as well as its powerful projection onto policies pursued by international organizations, the SPaSIO project funded by the NCN “Sonata 6” Grant tackles this theoretical and empirical problem aiming to explore and explain the phenomenon of ‘strategic partnerships’ between states and international organizations. This theoretically informed interdisciplinary collaborative research project, located at the cutting edge of political science, international relations and foreign policy analysis, develops the analytical model of a ‘strategic partnership’ between a state and an international organization identifiable and deployable beyond the state-centered alliance or hard/soft power balancing theories and approaches. The devised methodological framework encompasses a mixed methods research strategy and benefits from the synergetic deployment of qualitative and quantitative research techniques, including the performance of computer-assisted qualitative (<i>Atlas.ti</i>) and quantitative (<i>SPSS</i>) data analysis. With ‘strategic partnerships’ manifesto research (documentary analysis and strategic narratives analysis) at the core of its methodological concept, the project will empirically examine twelve spatially diversified case studies sampled representatively to reflect a basic 3x4 matrix of interaction between states and international organizations (three levels for states as strategic actors: global, major and minor regional powers; four levels for international organizations as strategic actors: global international and supranational strategic actors, as well as major and minor regional strategic actors).</p>	

Background and objectives

At the close of the twentieth century, international relations history has been repeatedly ascribed to enter a new era. Not only the key posture of the post-war international system, the 'cold war', came to the end, but also the emerged globalization process has overwhelmingly contributed since then to ever-growing interdependence in world politics. The apparent change of the international system's 'polarity' following the collapse of the Soviet Union has flexibilized once rigid framework of choice and constraint in international relations and thus enhanced states' sovereign capabilities to define and defend their own strategic goals which earlier, for nearly fifty years, had to be pursued in the shadow of alignment with either of the world's two power poles. Among many other structural and substantial effects that these power shifts and perplexing globalization have wielded upon the modern international relations, one may prima facie identify a dramatically widened scope of international actors that now encompasses – along with traditional nation-state partners and allies in security and defense – a diversity of international organizations (IOs), including intergovernmental, supranational or even non-governmental ones, as well as other non-state actors. Given the rising affirmative and legitimate nature of autonomous decision-making by international organizations and, moreover, their capability of entering into legally binding agreements as well as undertaking autonomous actions, the international organizations have justifiably become a frequent choice for states when selecting partners to pursue their own strategic goals. In a world of uncertainty, which hardly may give a sign for an (ever) established stability, the perplexing world economies and incrementally interdependent politics create as much possibilities as constraints for cooperation and thus challenge policy-making of both state and non-state international actors pushing them into the traps of joint decision-making. In response to the challenges of ever changing international system, with interdependencies and uncertainties abound, states' foreign policy apparatus has celebrated in early 1990s the birth of 'strategic partnerships'. With the millennial change in 2000s, the contagious use of 'strategic partnerships' tool by international organizations has contributed to the diffusion of the phenomenon and proliferation of 'strategic partnerships' politics all across the globe.

Although both scholars and practitioners of international relations have acknowledged the emergence of 'strategic partnerships' as a new form of cooperation between states and international organizations, the term and highly politicized phenomenon it describes remains, to a larger extend, an ill-defined concept in political science and international relations. This poses a problem for both theory and practice and raises the principal *question*, which this project seeks to address: What is a 'strategic partnership' between a state and an international organization, and how to distinguish between its basic variations, that is substantial and non-substantial partnerships?

Given the complexity, which the phenomenon of 'strategic partnerships' between states and international organizations implies for both theoretical comprehension and practice of international politics, this research project is meant to advance the two-fold *research goal* as follows:

Theoretically, it shall represent a comprehensive exploratory and explanatory study into the notion of *strategic partnerships between states and international organizations*, understood as a new and special form of international relations (strategic cooperation) and a novel foreign policy tool deployable by both states and international organizations.

The envisaged 'ideal model' will be developed thus as an analytical template enabling to approach the phenomenon from diverse disciplinary perspectives, such as international relations, comparative politics, and foreign policy analysis. It will enable clear definition and identification of the notion regardless of its particular designation (domain of deployment) in real-life international politics. As such, it will provide a methodologically verified 'analytical check template', i.e. the operational definition itself and the key constitutive features of the 'strategic partnership' concept in its genuine understanding.

Empirically, the project seeks to deliver a comparative study of strategic cooperation between a set of international organizations, on the one hand, and a set of states, on the other hand, sampled representatively. Theoretically informed, this examination into the practice of 'strategic partnerships' shall challenge the simplistic and sporadic approach to the notion followed in a rather conventional manner in public and political discourses. Evaluation of the researched cases against the matrix of the developed necessity and sufficiency clauses offers a methodologically enhanced basis for the assessment of this emerging and highly politicized notion in relationship between a state and an international organization.

Concept and approach

Conceptualization of '*strategic partnership*' as a special kind of strategically determined sustainable cooperative relationship between a *state* and an *international organization* presumes ipso facto an ontological standing that treats both states and international institutions (organizations) as *strategic actors* in international relations.

'Strategic partnerships' are sought to operate in an emerging and truly dynamic international environment marked by the shaping of multiple gravitational nodes of power (multinodality) and thus inherent power shifts within structure of international relations. Much in a shared tradition of neorealist and neoliberal institutionalist systemic visions, it is acknowledged also herewith, *first*, that the anarchy (i.e. the absence of a higher and thus hierarchy-inducing world government) guides actors' patterns of behavior. The project posits, *second*, that the emerging multinodality induces both opportunities and constraints for actors' strategic choices and behavior in the international system where, since the end of the 'cold war', a formation of 'power nodes' as gravitation centers of different sorts of power (be it conventional hard power, soft or smart power, normative or structural power, just as even 'normal' or ideal power) can be observed. Precisely 'power nodes', rather than 'power poles', shape nowadays the cores of normative attraction and structural power projection, with international organizations, such as probably the most well-known 'poster child' of strategic partnership – the European Union, as incrementally emerging new loci of power concentration. The changing nature of links and relationships between the international players under conditions of multinodality implies the impossibility of any pre-determined pattern of actors' behavior, which is why the project pleads, *third*, that – in the context of globalized interdependence and power competition – both strategic rivalry and cooperation reflect the picture of interaction not only between the states themselves, but also between them and international organizations that increasingly gain recognition of their own strategic actorness and thus become a frequent choice by states looking for sustainable, reliable and resilient strategic cooperation partners. The project's ontological standing rests therefore upon the following *four principal assumptions*: both states and IOs can be seen as autonomous actors in international

relations (the level of autonomy, it has to be acknowledged, varies not only in case of IOs, but also in case of states as far as strategic actorness capacity is concerned); both states and IOs are rational and strategically powerful actors capable of defining and pursuing their own strategic goals, just as develop shared understandings of the latter ones; in the emerging multipolar system, marked by a widespread multinodality as a determining systemic feature, both states and IOs are driven by the necessity to cooperate in order to meet the challenges of deepening interdependence and uncertainty and use the strategic partnerships as effective tools for a long-term linkage, bonding, and maintaining of sustainable and reliable strategic relationships; it therefore follows that a cohort of pre-accession tools, although potentially also reflecting the essence of the notion but designed primarily as a formula of ‘cooperation for accession’, has to be excluded from the theoretical focus of this project.

Framed this way ontologically, this research project follows epistemologically a holistic and integral theoretical approach shaped in the tradition of ‘neo-neo-synthesis’ and thus synergizing neorealist and neoinstitutionalist accounts within the analytical framework of *strategic-relational approach (SRA)*.

Methodology and work packages

The inherent complexity of the emerging and contested notion of ‘strategic partnerships’ has informed the methodological design of the SPaSIO research project, which is devised within the framework of *mixed methods research* strategy. As such, it deploys, in a constructive and synergetic way, both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Qualitative content analysis presents the basis of qualitative research that is performed within the *strategic partnerships’ ‘manifesto’ analysis* that is documentary analysis and strategic narratives analysis in an original blend. Since the project focuses on explicitly declared strategic partnerships between states and international organizations, first of all *bilateral partnership manifestos* (partnership-founding documents, i.e. declarations, statements, agreements, framework agreements; partnership-implementing documents, i.e. joint statements, communiqués, declarations, action plans, programmes, decisions of joint bodies) but also *unilateral ones* (mainly actors’ foreign and security policy manifestos, but also country or IO development strategies, official statements, speeches, etc.) will be given analytical scrutiny. Computer-assisted qualitative content analysis will be deployed on the basis of *Atlas.ti* software. The *SPSS*-based quantitative content analysis, but also process tracing, and event analysis will complement the project’s interdisciplinary effort in validating the advanced theory of strategic partnerships and generating original replicable data reflecting the politics of strategic partnerships between states and IOs.

The research workflow will be organized around the main three working packages. *WP1 ‘strategic cooperation willingness’* will examine the convergence of strategic goals and actors’ international roles as factors of partner selection and launch of strategic cooperation. *WP2 ‘strategic cooperation sustainability’* will enquire the premises and promises of long-term, institutionalised, dynamic and developing, as well as resilient commitment to the partnership. *WP3 ‘strategic partnership reliability’* will examine the extent to which fidelity and practical commitment to the idea of partnership, unique liaison and linkage as well as developed cooperation structures (including joint decision-making bodies) may contribute to the shaping and maintaining of strategically relevant and resilient forms of international cooperation between states and international organizations.