Abstract

This chapter explores the challenges of nuclear non-proliferation in EU–Asia relations on three levels: multilateral, inter-regional and bilateral. The EU plays a distinctive role in nuclear non-proliferation within the global dimension as well as in relations with Asia. As a strong advocate of the non-proliferation norm, the EU has acted as a normative power that supports the global non-proliferation regime in its relationship with Asia through multilateral, inter-regional, and bilateral dialogue and cooperation, however imperfect these measures may be. This is clearly reflected in its preference and strong support for the treaty on the NPT and the IAEA norms as well as the close cooperation between the IAEA and Euratom to support the NPT regime. The EU’s participation in the KEDO demonstrates its multilateral efforts for nuclear non-proliferation in EU–Asia relations. Inter-regional dialogue and cooperation in the ASEM, the ARF and the AEMM serve as tools to complement multilateral approaches regarding nuclear proliferation in Asia as well as to pursue close coordination of inter-regional security issues. The EU also enforces bilateral relations with major Asian countries: particular attention needs to be paid to the EU’s strategic cooperation with China and Japan, which led to the 2004 Joint Declarations on Non-proliferation and Arms Control.

Introduction

Nuclear non-proliferation, traditionally of less prominence than issues such as economic or normative concerns in EU–Asia relations, has been gaining importance in recent decades. While the EU has only limited power in this issue area, which is still dominated by the sovereignty concerns of nation states, it has deepened the concerns, shared with Asia, about national and international insecurity that will be caused by nuclear proliferation. In line with the common concerns, the EU has expanded its dialogue and cooperation with Asian countries through multilateral, inter-regional and bilateral frameworks.
The largest constraint on the EU is that its member states have not delegated the decision-making power for non-proliferation policy to the Union. The EU possesses only limited abilities regarding nuclear non-proliferation within its European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) and its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP): the former, regarding the civilian use of nuclear technologies inside the Union, is intended mostly for its member states; the latter is concerned with the Union’s external relations pertaining to foreign and security policies, though its member states have delegated very limited power to the EU, as they wish to maintain their own national policies. The EU has accordingly focussed on finding a harmonised and united position among its member states’ national policies with respect to international nuclear non-proliferation issues, including Asian regional issues.

Asian countries, for their part, do not consider the EU as a major partner on regional security issues, including nuclear non-proliferation, for at least two reasons. First, they view the US as a more salient actor who has maintained not only more interest in the Asia-Pacific but also more influence over the region than Europe has at least since the end of the Second World War. Second, many Asian countries believe that the EU’s security policies are still heavily affected by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Given that the US maintains an extended nuclear deterrence over the NATO member states, the EU’s ability to formulate its own non-proliferation policies remains structurally constrained. Most Asian countries thus see the EU more as an economic power than as a political or military one, diminishing their interest in collaborating with the EU on non-proliferation.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that nuclear non-proliferation has been completely absent from the agenda of EU–Asia relations. Due to growing, and shared, concerns regarding the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and terrorism in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001 (9/11), the EU and Asian countries have adopted a variety of frameworks for dialogue and cooperation on nuclear non-proliferation at multilateral, inter-regional and bilateral levels. First, the EU, a strong advocate of the non-proliferation regime, has strongly supported the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons (NPT) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in its relationship with Asia. The EU’s participation in the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), in particular, demonstrates its support for the global non-proliferation norm and its preference for a multilateral approach. Second, in deference to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries’ preference for inter-regional frameworks, such as with the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the ASEAN–EU Foreign Ministers Meeting (AEMM), the EU has supported the non-proliferation norm within the inter-regional dialogue and cooperation frameworks. Finally, bilateralism remains most salient in the EU’s work with