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EUROPE, CHINA AND AFRICA

NEW THINKING FOR A SECURE CENTURY

REPORT



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INTRODUCTION

With populism and nationalism on the rise – and following Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States (US) – the EU and its international partners may need to rethink collective security and global trade structures, noted **Giles Merritt**, Secretary General of Friends of Europe.

Friends of Europe's meeting, "Europe, China, and Africa: New thinking for a secure century," brought together policymakers and experts to discuss the way forward for China-EU cooperation on the African continent.

"If we consider Africa's vast development needs, it is clear that international collaboration is essential and compelling," said moderator **Shada Islam**, Director of Europe & Geopolitics at Friends of Europe. "We need to work together to bring peace and security to the continent."

Africa's population of over 1.2 billion is projected to double by 2050. This growth suggests increasing security problems on the continent. "The immediate effect of a Trump presidency is that the EU and China will have to take greater responsibility for international peace," Merritt said, "and security and stability in Africa is high on the agenda. Moving forward, we must have a more responsible China and a more proactive EU acting together in Africa."

"In the current globalised world, the EU is an actor that cannot act in isolation," stressed **José Fernando Costa Pereira**, Policy Adviser, European External Action Service (EEAS), Directorate for Africa. "We have an interest in working with China on the objectives and targets that we have in common."

SECURITY BEFORE BUSINESS

As they broaden economic relations with the African continent, and as the number of Chinese there grows into the millions, Chinese leaders are waking up to their duty to protect their citizens on the ground and that business is not possible without security, noted Costa Pereira.

At the same time, EU-Africa trade relations based in a large part on Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) seek to move beyond the colonial baggage that has for so long defined the relationship between the two continents.

The EPAs, which are meant to be regional development agreements between the EU and sub-continental groupings of African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries have been quite controversial, as they sometimes do not respect African regional boundaries as they are currently understood, said **Yentyl Williams**, EU-ACP Trade Researcher at the University of Gent and Founder of the ACP Young Professionals Network.

"The difference between African visions of development and the EU's vision that is superimposed via trade is an issue with no clear solution for the moment," she said. Going forward with the EPAs means closely

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examining their potential effects and highlighting areas that need a lot of work, particularly on the security-trade nexus.

“We cannot talk about security without linking it to trade,” she stressed. “To secure access to markets, we must first ensure that we are working with stable regions.”

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China’s policies contributing to peace, security, and stability in Africa are based on the following four pillars:

- Non-interference in the national affairs of African countries and abiding by the basic norms of international relations. On this basis, China’s leadership offers to constructively participate in the peaceful settlement of hotspot issues, according to the needs and wishes of the countries concerned;
- supporting African countries, regional organisations, and African Union (AU) initiatives to confront African problems with African solutions;
- advocating settling disputes through peaceful means in the framework of the United Nations (UN) and other international organisations. Military intervention should only be considered as a last resort and should be conducted under the authorisation of the UN and with the permission of the countries concerned, and;
- Comprehensive management of hotspot issues. Conflicts in Africa are often complicated by national, religious, and social issues and should be considered from a holistic perspective in order to tackle symptoms and root causes at the same time.

“It must be made clear that China is open to working with the EU as with the US, Russia, and other countries to promote peace and stability in Africa,” he concluded. While China welcomes more in-depth partnerships with international partners, Chinese cooperation in Africa will remain focussed on the principles of ‘raised by Africa, agreed by Africa, and led by Africa’.

AFRICAN SOLUTIONS FOR AFRICAN PROBLEMS

“Now more than ever, we have to acknowledge that many countries have serious issues to deal with at home,” Williams said. “In these troubled times, it is becoming clear that African problems need African solutions and, in this regard, the priority should be the African Union’s Agenda 2063. Chinese, European, and African cooperation should complement this vision.”

This cooperation should be founded on the principle of ownership by Africans. As more inclusive and equal partnerships develop in an increasingly connected world, their focus is shifting away from more

traditional official development assistance (ODA) towards foreign direct investment and remittances, which alone was valued at USD 432bn worldwide in 2015, more than three times the value of ODA over the same time period.

Cooperation is indeed the guiding principle of Chinese involvement in Africa, stressed Zhang. “We support peaceful resolutions to security issues on the continent and are encouraging countries, regional organisations, and the African Union to solve regional issues through African means.”

The bottom line is that “Chinese and European interests in Africa are converging,” Costa Pereira said, “particularly in the areas of peace and security. We believe that these common interests provide us with a broader scope for trilateral cooperation between China, the EU, and African partners.”

LOOKING AHEAD TO TRILATERAL COOPERATION

Chinese, European, and African policymakers have selected peace and security as a policy area ripe for cooperation, being an area of common interest between the three partners. In concert with their Chinese counterparts, Costa Pereira stressed that European leaders have established a framework strategy to enhance cooperation, particularly in Africa.

“We have come to understand that we have practices and ways of doing business that are different than our partners’,” he said. “However, the potential for a strong and trust-based relationship is there and it is starting to be realised.”

Concerning China-EU cooperation in Africa, it is more accurate to depict the relationship as trilateral cooperation including African partners, stressed Williams. The virtue of trilateral, as opposed to bilateral, cooperation is that each partner has more leeway to leverage their strengths.

Looking ahead, these partners have an opportunity to share their strengths and learn from the EU’s history with the continent, China’s competitive advantage, so strongly represented in recent years, and Africa’s regional perspectives.

While discussion between the three actors is largely focussed on promoting peace and stability in Africa, cooperation on climate action and renewable energy is a priority as well. “Though we share common perspectives with China on renewable energy in Africa, this is an area where we need to improve the dialogue,” noted Costa Pereira.

“China and the EU already have a good working relationship on climate change negotiations and the development of renewables, and the African continent represents strong potential for renewables,” Zhang stressed. “I am very much looking forward to working together with our partners to develop pilot projects in this field in Africa.”

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CONCLUSION

With the increasing political, social, and economic uncertainty resulting from widespread populist shifts in Europe and the US, the relationships between Europe, China, and Africa become more important on a global scale as they mature and change.

“In order to have ownership of our policies and decisions, Africans need ownership of their institutions and an equal seat at the table,” concluded Williams. “As cooperation between the EU, China, and Africa intensifies, we should see more involvement from Africans and the creation of an official EU-China-Africa forum.”

Moving forward, it behoves the three actors to focus on security issues in Africa for reasons of trade and prosperity, as well as establishing a framework for future trilateral cooperation based on the common interests of peace and stability. To this end, the partners are embracing Africa’s central role in such cooperation and support finding African solutions for African problems.



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Shada Islam, Director of Europe & Geopolitics at Friends of Europe





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