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China and the European Union (EU) are important trading partners for each other with a strong economic complementarity, broad cooperation area, and great developmental potential. Under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China and the EU have actively promoted the liberalization and facilitation of trade and investment and have maintained the stability and smoothness of the industrial and supply chain, which sets a demonstrating example for partnership between the major economies in the world as well as for South-North cooperation.

The African continent is one of the most significant intersection points of foreign cooperation strategies and policies of both China and the EU. While the EU has been playing a role as an active participant in Africa's post-independence economic and social development, under the architecture framed by Lome Conventions and Cotonou Agreement, China shows its commitment and dedication to supporting Africa's modernization as well, especially under the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). In the context of engaging in Africa's path towards implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, a more effective China-EU cooperation, supported by the trilateral international cooperation which calls for the joint participation and contribution of China, the EU, and also African countries, would help to explore a more effective approach to guarantee the implementation of the African Union's Agenda 2063.

1. Internal Logic of China-EU Trilateral International Cooperation in General

The trilateral international cooperation between China and the EU has both theoretical basis and practical needs. Besides, the increase of "external demand" from the international third-party market and "internal demand" from China and the EU have also contributed to the cooperation.

Firstly, "external demand" for trilateral cooperation is progressively higher in the international third-party market. And the primary reason why China and the EU could quickly reach an agreement on international trilateral cooperation is that the third-party market is continuously growing. The increasing demand for foreign investment from the vast number of developing countries has led to the relaxation of restrictions on it, and also the implementation of more active export-oriented economic policies, which has provided "external demand" for China and the EU to carry out international trilateral cooperation and has given China and the EU more cooperative partners.

Secondly, the "internal demand" of China and the EU has increased. At present, both China and the EU are in a critical period of economic development. Both sides place high expectations on deepening international cooperation in innovative forms and promoting future development.

The trilateral international cooperation between China and the EU is of very positive and great significance and is conducive to the recovery and development of the world economy. At present, the world economic recovery still lacks strong support and impetus amid the pandemic impact. While the economic recovery of developed countries is relatively slow, emerging economies almost collectively experienced a "stall". Developing the real economy and expanding market demand may be the best ways to support world economic recovery. Hereby, promoting trilateral cooperation from the international perspective, combining the advantages of developed European countries and China as a world-leading emerging economy can effectively inject new impetus into the economic recovery agendas of different parties, especially developing countries. On the one hand, it could drive the capital and product output of European countries, and on the other hand, it promotes the industrial production capacity output

of China. By combining these comparative advantages, developing countries could embrace new opportunities for industrial upgrading and job creation, which would bring new vitality to their recovery plans in the post-pandemic era. As one of the most important nodes which connect the foreign cooperation architecture of both China and the EU, Africa would be naturally among the ideal destinations to develop trilateral international cooperation participated by China and the EU.

2. Areas of China-EU Trilateral International Cooperation in Africa

There are two main ways for China and the EU to carry out international trilateral cooperation: cooperation in both investment and aid. The key areas of cooperation between the two sides should be the overlapping areas in the field of foreign direct investment and foreign aid, the advantageous areas either enjoyed by China or the EU in the non-overlapping areas, and areas with large third-party markets demanding and high investment value. In the context of Africa, the following focuses called by the AU's Agenda 2063 would be the priorities in cooperation between the two sides.

1. High-end manufacturing. It is necessary to promote the civil aircraft industry in the aviation field with a good foundation for cooperation for the two sides to enter the African market. In the field of rail transportation, the two sides could carry out relevant technical exchanges and R&D cooperation and promote the construction of mainline railways and urban railways in African metropolises. Regarding automobile, steel, and machinery manufacturing, the establishment of factories in African countries, such as Johannesburg, Nairobi, Lagos, and the expansion of the African consumer market should all be actively encouraged.

2. Finance. Including promoting the cooperation between financial institutions of both sides to setting up branches in the African market; promoting financial institutions of both sides to provide joint financing services and increasing equity investment business for Chinese and European enterprises and related enterprises in African countries. Besides, China and the EU should also promote regular informative communication between financial institutions of both sides on the financial support of trilateral international cooperation and encourage the financial institutions to innovate

financial service modes, such as a new financing mode of combining public funds and private funds in the cooperation projects, and the like. This approach is expected to effectively neutralize the challenges of insufficient finance support faced by African countries when engaging in projects of modernization.

3. Energy. In the field of new energy notably, both sides should explore cooperation in solar energy, wind energy, and other fields that should be concerned. The technology and equipment exported to Africa would help to ease the power scarcity of local societies. In terms of energy, mineral exploration, development, and processing, enterprises of both sides are encouraged to cooperate in African countries, especially in those which has enjoyed a relatively rich natural endowment, such as Nigeria, Zambia, Angola, and DRC.

4. Infrastructure construction. Both sides are encouraged to cooperate in investing in infrastructure projects such as railways, airports, harbors, and telecommunications in Africa to improve connectivity among different sub-regions. Key investment targets should be countries that act as engines to promote sub-regional economic integration, such as South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, and Egypt, which should be enabled to play a more active role in implementing the “Three Networks and Industrialization”.

5. Scientific research and technology services. Both sides are encouraged to cooperate to set up new R&D departments and technical service centers in African countries, especially in those with huge potential talents, and make full use of the technology and scientific research talents of the local society, improve the technical level and contribute to technological progress to African economic and social development.

6. Overseas Industrial Parks. The overseas economic and trade cooperation zones are important modes for China to carry out foreign direct investment. The establishment of industrial parks overseas will also be an effective way for China to conduct economic and trade cooperation in African countries. China and the EU could cooperate to set up industrial parks in African countries and take the parks as a platform to facilitate the international cooperation of production capacity, as well as the new leverage to facilitate industrial upgrading.

Aside from investment cooperation, in aid cooperation between the two sides, the following areas should be put special focus.

1. Agriculture and food security. The key fields of cooperation are: jointly building agricultural technology demonstration centers or corresponding projects in African countries; joint dispatch of agricultural experts and technicians; joint training of local agrotechnicians; cooperation in the construction of irrigation and water conservancy projects to improve the grain production capacity of African countries; cooperation in carrying out breeding industries; cooperation in the fields of ecological agriculture, agricultural mechanization, rural energy and geographical indications. Moreover, both sides could corporately offer agricultural machinery, agricultural produce processing equipment, and related agricultural materials to African countries. These contributions would effectively support Africa to develop more resilient agriculture, which benefits to cope with the food crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflicts.

2. Economic and public infrastructure construction. Both sides could jointly provide funds, technical guidance, materials, and equipment for the construction of roads, bridges, railways, airports, ports, and other infrastructure in Africa; explore a way of assistance and cooperation in energy supply infrastructures, such as communication and power; jointly assist African countries in the construction of public welfare facilities and civil buildings for locals.

3. Education and training. China and the EU could jointly help to build schools and offer teaching kits, jointly offer training to educational administrators and teachers, and joint education for international students from African countries, especially in vocational areas.

4. Medical and public health. Both sides could jointly assist African countries in building hospitals and providing medical equipment and supplies, jointly dispatch medical technical experts, and train medical personnel, especially to make up for the shortage of equipment and talents in dealing with current infectious diseases such as Ebola and COVID-19.

5. Environmental protection and climate change response. Both sides may carry

out joint research on clean energy production and supply in African countries, by promoting the production and utilization of hydropower, solar energy, wind energy, and other renewable energy in Africa, and by improving their energy efficiency, and holding clean energy and climate change training.

3. Recommendation for Optimizing China-Europe Cooperation

1. Abide by the principle of non-exclusive and non-discriminatory. Theoretically, the partners of Chinese international trilateral cooperation should include all African countries. Thereby, in the third-party market cooperation between China and the EU, any African country can act as a third party, which would be the focus under the framework of the BRI. The meaning of international trilateral cooperation itself includes that each one of the three parties has equal status in the cooperation, whether the third-party market is a developed economy, an emerging economy, or a least developed country, equal respect should be granted, in which all stakeholders should equally perform their duties and exercise rights.

2. Promote public-private partnership. In the trilateral cooperation in the field of international investment, both sides should insist on promoting the joint participation of the national public and also the private sector, take different advantages of each other's strengths, and promote multi-form and multi-level cooperation. The PPP cooperation mode and the diversification of investment subjects should be widely promoted in the implementation of specific projects. The threshold for private enterprises to participate in international cooperation should be reduced, the development space could be broadened, and the rational allocation of resources and risk will be realized.

3. Uphold standards of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG). To promote sustainable economic and social development on the basis of protecting the African countries' ecosystem and natural resources and contribute to Africa's response to climate mitigation and adaptation, any international trilateral cooperation project must comply with the respective environmental protection standards of the three parties at the same time, especially the host African countries, and adopt the highest standard

as far as possible. Enterprises engaged in international trilateral cooperation must earnestly fulfill their social responsibilities and make the corresponding contribution to labor rights and interests, environmental protection, community construction, anti-corruption, cultural exchanges, charity promotion, scientific and technological development, and other aspects.

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