

Visions for Europe

An EU Trilateral Cooperation Agenda with Africa and China for a Post-COVID-19 World

Dr. Anna Stahl, Policy Fellow, Jacques Delors Centre

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At a time when the world is facing the unprecedented challenge of a pandemic and a variety of other pressing global issues, the EU needs to assert a new geopolitical identity and reshape its relations with international players, in particular Africa and China. On the basis of recommendations formulated by a group of distinguished European, African and Chinese experts, this policy paper proposes an EU strategic agenda for cooperation with Africa and China. The ambitious trilateral cooperation strategy is centred around three policy areas: health, economic development, good governance and security.

This paper is part of the “Visions for Europe” series, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Finance. Papers within the series develop longer-term visions and recommendations for different EU policy areas and are based on extensive consultation with experts and stakeholders. For this paper, an expert group, composed of distinguished European, African and Chinese scholars was convened in May and in November 2020. The paper also draws on insights from interviews with experts in Brussels and different member states.

Executive summary

More than ten years ago, the EU initiated a trilateral dialogue with China and Africa, with little result. Today, the EU is faced with a world increasingly defined by great power competition and the risk of economic and technological decoupling. In order to assert itself on the world stage, the EU is trying to play a geopolitical role. At the same time, the pandemic serves as a reminder of the fact that global challenges require international solutions. The current crisis is also highlighting the importance of public goods that transcend national borders and spread their costs and benefits across different regions. Thus, new international alliances are needed and strategic cooperation between the EU, Africa and China is more necessary than ever.

This policy paper formulates a new, ambitious EU strategic agenda for cooperation with Africa and China. The new form of EU, Africa, China trilateral cooperation cannot only provide a solution for the provision of global public goods in a post-COVID-19 world, but also strengthen the EU's geopolitical ambitions. In contrast to the EU's initial trilateral initiative, the novel EU trilateral cooperation strategy should focus on Africa. By highlighting the respective comparative advantages of the EU's and China's approach, trilateral cooperation can advance Africa's own policy priorities and foster Africa's strategic leverage in global affairs.

11 policy recommendations are proposed in this paper. They are grouped around three key issue areas. Health is on top of the EU trilateral cooperation agenda with Africa and China, followed by more medium-term economic development. Good governance and security offer more long-term prospects for trilateral cooperation.

Figure 1: Strategic cooperation between the EU, Africa and China

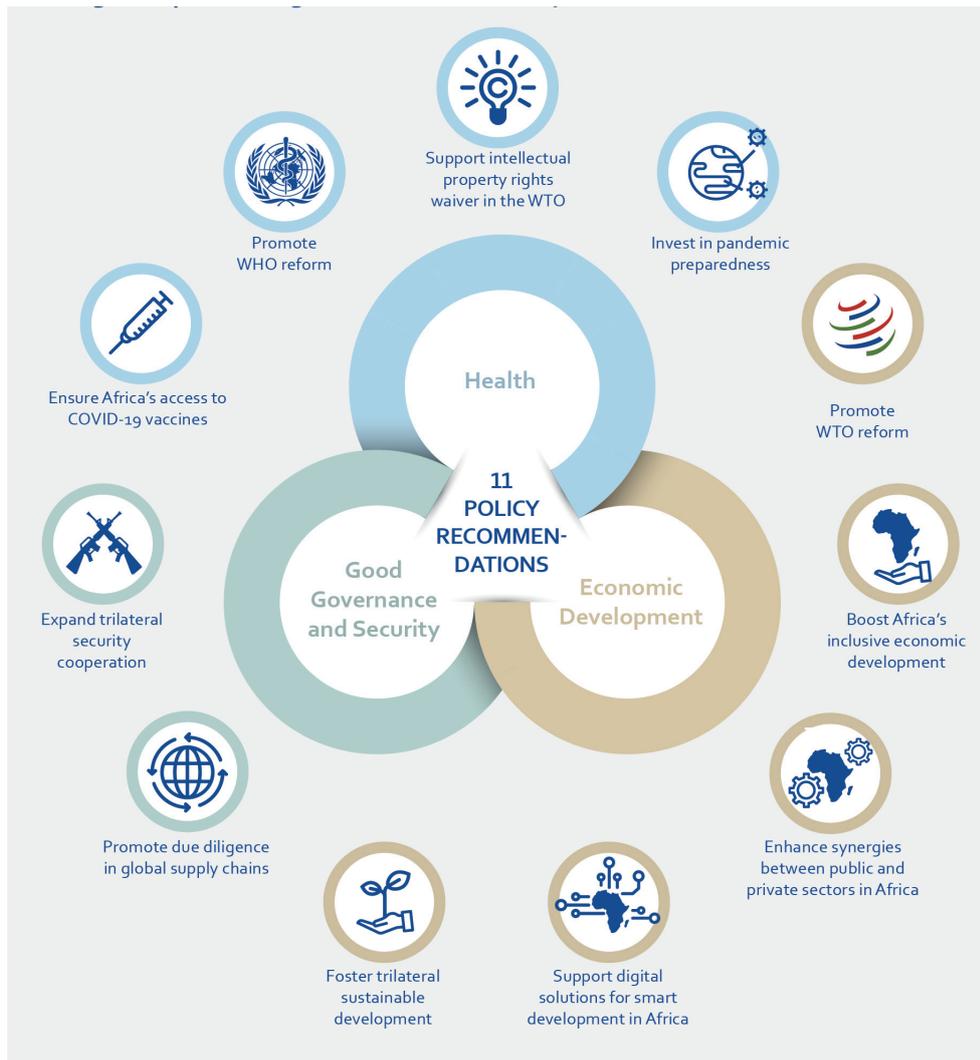


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Introduction

In 2008, the EU proposed a trilateral dialogue with China and Africa.¹ More than ten years later, strategic cooperation between the EU, Africa and China is more necessary than ever. At a time when the world is facing the unprecedented challenge of a pandemic and a variety of other pressing global issues, the EU needs to assert a new geopolitical identity and reshape its relations with a number of international players, in particular Africa and China.

Africa is at the top of the EU's foreign policy agenda.² As the summit between the EU and the African Union (AU) scheduled for last year had to be postponed because of the pandemic, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell declared 2021 to be "the Africa year for the European Union".³ Given that the first continental EU-Africa summit was organised under a Portuguese Council Presidency in 2000, it is also no coincidence that the current Portuguese Presidency has identified Africa as a key foreign policy priority.

Since the failure of the EU's trilateral proposal with China and Africa in 2008, Brussels has tried to readjust its relationship with Africa.⁴ The EU's trilateral offer was rejected by a majority of African leaders, because they believed that their continent was being instrumentalised by the EU.⁵ With a view to establishing a new continental EU-Africa partnership between equals, the EU published a communication for a comprehensive strategy with Africa last year.⁶ At the same time, the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States⁷ reached a political deal for a new Partnership Agreement to succeed the Cotonou Agreement.⁸

Over the past thirteen years, not only EU-Africa relations, but also the broader international environment has considerably changed. China's emergence as a global power has contributed to a new world of power politics. It has pushed the EU to gradually adapt its posture on the increasingly conflicted world stage and transform into a geopolitical actor. In its 2019 China strategy paper,⁹ the EU reiterates its commitment to the strategic partnership with China, while for the first time acknowledging that China is an economic competitor and systemic rival. The geopolitical dimension of EU-China relations has become more salient with the outbreak of COVID-19. Thus, high hopes were placed on the German Council Presidency and the EU-China summit scheduled for September 2020, in the presence of the leaders of all EU member states. These expectations were dashed, as the 22nd virtual EU-China summit between the Brussels and Beijing resulted in little progress, not even a joint Sino-European declaration. While many saw this as a sign

¹ European Commission, *The EU, Africa and China: Towards trilateral dialogue and cooperation*, Brussels, 17 October 2008.

² Handy, P-S. and Kenhago Tazo, O., *Europe and Africa at a crossroads*, Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Today, 16 September 2020.

³ Fox, Benjamin, *2021 must be EU's 'Africa year', says Borrell*, Euractive, 27 October 2020.

⁴ Ling, J., *Aid to Africa: What can the EU and China Learn from Each Other?*, The South African Institute of Internal Affairs (SAIIA), Occasional Paper No. 56, March 2010.

⁵ WikiLeaks, *Cable 10BEIJING367*, 11 February 2011.

⁶ European Commission, *Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa*, Brussels, 9 March 2020.

⁷ Since April 2020, referred to as the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS).

⁸ The Cotonou Agreement will be further extended until 30 November 2021, unless the new Agreement enters into force or is provisionally applied before that date.

⁹ European Commission and EU High Representative, *EU-China – A Strategic Outlook*, Brussels, 12 March 2019.

of failure in EU geopolitical ambitions, they were caught by surprise by, in turn, the successful conclusion of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) in December¹⁰ and recent EU sanctions against China over human rights abuses.¹¹ In response to the latter, China endorsed sanctions against a number of European individuals and entities, marking a turning point in EU-China relations.¹²

Against this background, concerns within the EU regarding a policy of engagement with China have increased over the past years and the concept of trilateral cooperation has become subject to much prejudice and misconceptions. In response to China's international assertiveness, a growing number of policymakers is calling for a tougher EU approach. Sino-European geopolitical tensions have further intensified against the background of U.S.-China rivalry. Under the new Biden administration, the U.S. will continue to approach China as a rival in other parts of the world, including in Africa.¹³ This growing U.S.-China rivalry creates the risk of the EU being squeezed between the big powers. In order to dispel any suggestions the EU is merely a passive bystander in the post-COVID-19 world order, Brussels should propose a third way by formulating a trilateral cooperation agenda with Africa and China. Through a proactive EU, China, Africa trilateral strategy, the EU could demonstrate international leadership. The COVID-19 crisis shows that global challenges can only be dealt with through international cooperation and drawing up common solutions. It is neither in the interest of the EU nor that of Africa to be dragged into big power rivalry with China. While trilateral cooperation is aimed at offering an alternative to a global zero-sum mindset of big power rivalry, it recognises the new geopolitical reality and acknowledges the fact Sino-European competition is not per se determinantal for Africa.

Unlike the 2008 initiative, **the novel EU trilateral cooperation agenda should be centred around Africa** and fully engage Africa as a partner with its own policy priorities and set of external partnerships.¹⁴ By highlighting the respective comparative advantages of the EU's and China's approach, trilateral cooperation could assist Africa to formulate its own development model.

This paper formulates an **ambitious EU strategic agenda for cooperation with Africa and China**. It identifies relevant policy areas and makes concrete proposals for trilateral cooperation. The paper starts by exploring the trends and drivers guiding the EU, China and Africa in the context of the transition to a post-COVID-19 world order. It then identifies **three potential areas** for an EU policy agenda with Africa and China: health, economic development, peace and security. Finally, a series of **concrete policy recommendations for the EU** is set out.

“The concept of trilateral cooperation has become subject to much prejudice and misconceptions”

“The novel EU trilateral cooperation agenda should be centred around Africa”

¹⁰ European Commission, *EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI)*, Brussels 30 December 2020.

¹¹ Council of the EU, *Press release*, 22 March 2021.

¹² Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Announces Sanctions on Relevant EU Entities and Personnel*, Beijing, 22 March 2021.

¹³ Rogin, Josh, *Opinion: Biden's U.N. ambassador nominee to face criticism for past praise of China*, Washington Post, 27 January 2021.

¹⁴ It is an explicit recommendation of the Expert Group.

1 The EU, China, Africa and the global order: trends and drivers

This section looks at developments influencing the EU, China and Africa and shows how they will shape the post-COVID-19 world order.

1.1 EU geopolitical ambitions

In recent years, the EU has adjusted to the new reality of power play politics. The 2016 EU Global Strategy¹⁵ indicated an initial geopolitical¹⁶ shift in EU foreign policy. While for a long time European policymakers emphasised the EU's role as a benign global player, they adopted in 2019 a **new rhetoric of strategic power**¹⁷ to respond to the international environment of geopolitical competition. According to this new geopolitical paradigm, if it is to remain an independent player on the international scene. European policymakers have thus engaged in efforts to enhance the EU's capacity to defend European interests with military means, as well as put greater weight on geoeconomics and the EU's ability to use its economic strengths strategically. These recent EU initiatives to assume greater responsibility have been labelled "strategic autonomy"¹⁸ or "European sovereignty"¹⁹. Due to its growing economic, technological and political influence on the European continent, China has gradually become part of the European discussion on the aforesaid strategic autonomy.²⁰

"The EU has adjusted to the new reality of power play politics"

While the EU's geopolitical paradigm shift represents a necessary recognition of the fact that the bloc is faced with a more competitive international environment, it also brings with it some risks. Defensive action by the EU could trigger a reaction by other international players that could spiral into a global zero-sum game. The EU's new geopolitical approach should therefore not ignore the fact that great powers have to be able to cooperate in certain areas, while competing in others. As the post-COVID-19 world order will be increasingly multipolar and complex, it will be almost impossible for a single international player to impose its will. To avoid being torn apart by big power rivalry, the EU will also have to foster international cooperation and build alliances.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the need for that international cooperation. In response to the global health emergency, the EU made initial efforts to fill the international leadership vacuum left by the U.S. under Donald Trump. As the COVID-19 crisis will have long-term socio-economic consequences and the new U.S. administration is faced with major domestic challenges, the EU should continue to assume international leadership by forging alliances and formulating

¹⁵ European External Action Service, *A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy*, Brussels, June 2016.

¹⁶ Although the term geopolitics originally referred to the impact of geography on politics, it has become largely associated with power politics and competition to dominate or control geographic areas.

¹⁷ Borrell, Josep, *Embracing Europe's Power*, Project Syndicate, 8 February 2020.

¹⁸ Lippert, B., von Ondarza, N. Perthes, V., (eds.), *European Strategic Autonomy*, SWP Research Paper 4, March 2019.

¹⁹ European council on foreign relations (ecfr), *European Sovereignty*.

²⁰ Franke, U. and Varma, T., *Independence play: Europe's pursuit of strategic autonomy*, 18 July 2019.

joint solutions to the global problems. While there have been European donations of coronavirus vaccines to Africa, the new Biden administration announced that it would not share doses with developing countries as long as domestic demand remained unmet.²¹ The EU's international identity remains different from that of traditional powers. It is thus well suited to adopting a **third way approach to traditional big power politics** in partnership with other bodies.²²

1.2 China's international aspirations and assertiveness

This year's Chinese New Year TV Gala attracted widespread international attention. The opening performance featured dances from various countries in Africa, Latin America and Europe participating in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). What was intended to demonstrate China's growing global presence for a Chinese domestic audience sparked unexpected international controversy.²³ The "African dance" by Chinese performers in African-style costumes and "blackened up" face makeup was criticised for being offensive and racist.²⁴ It is not the first time Beijing is accused of racism and discriminatory treatment of Africans.²⁵ Last year, videos of mistreatment of Africans in Guangzhou that went viral on social media provoked a diplomatic crisis between China and several African countries.²⁶ The recent incidents have demonstrated to Beijing that its **growing international engagement is not without obstacles** and it needs to address the reputational risks associated with its growing international aspirations.

Following its rapid economic growth, China has emerged as a **great power on the global stage**.²⁷ China's integration into the global system started under Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s and accelerated with the country's admission to the WTO in 2001. Since then, Beijing has joined a number of international organisations and expanded its influence in the UN, as shown by the victory of a Chinese candidate for head of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, China is conducting a more assertive foreign policy, centred around the BRI, also known as "One Belt One Road" (OBOR). This global initiative for connectivity and infrastructure development was launched by Beijing in 2013 and comprises both an overland Silk Road Economic Belt and a Maritime Silk Road.²⁸ The BRI projects are implemented by a number of different institutions and mostly financed through a specific Silk Road Fund (SRF). As well as raising its presence within existing multilateral institutions, China is starting to build new institutions, most prominently the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)²⁹ and the Multilateral Cooperation Center for Development Finance (MCCDF). While the U.S.

"China has emerged as a great power on the global stage"

²¹ Williams, A. and Kuchler, H., *US will not send vaccine to developing countries until supply improves*, Financial Times, 18 February 2021.

²² Blockmans, Steven, *Why the EU needs a geopolitical Commission*, CEPS, 15 September 2020.

²³ Xie, Echo, *China's Lunar New Year TV extravaganza hit again by blackface scandal*, South China Morning Post, 12 February 2021.

²⁴ McDonald, Joe, *Chinese TV features blackface performers in New Year's gala*, Los Angeles Times, 12 February 2021.

²⁵ Y. Wang, *From Covid to Blackface on TV, China's Racism Problem Runs Deep*, Human Rights Watch, 18 February 2021.

²⁶ J. Marsh, *Beijing faces a diplomatic crisis after reports of mistreatment of Africans in China causes outrage*, CNN, 14 April 2020.

²⁷ OECD Economic Surveys, *China*, April 2019.

²⁸ Chatzky, Andrew and McBride, James, *China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative*, 28 January 2020.

²⁹ Ikenberry, G. J. and Lim, D. J., *China's emerging institutional statecraft*, Brookings, April 2017.

sees it as a rival to the U.S.-based World Bank, European member states like Germany and France have joined the AIIB as founding members.

This expanding economic and political influence is increasingly transforming China **from a norm-taker to a norm-maker**. China's normative power stretches beyond international standards of agro-food markets³⁰ to embrace the tech industry³¹ and international cooperation with developing countries more broadly.³² The release of a new White Paper on "China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era"³³ early this year highlights its key role in international development cooperation. Unlike traditional donors such as the EU, China refers to cooperation with developing countries as "South-South cooperation" and has established its own International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA).³⁴

Africa has played a key role in Beijing's efforts to reach out to the developing world. Although it cannot yet match the EU's engagement in Africa, **China's activities across the African continent are growing**.³⁵ Since the establishment of the Forum for China-Africa-Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, regular summits between African heads of state and government and the Chinese leadership have been held. In addition to the expanding bilateral diplomatic relations highlighted by China's 2006 and 2015 Africa White Papers,³⁶ Beijing has also fostered relations with African regional and continental bodies, in particular the AU. China not only helped build AU Headquarters in Addis Abba, but also granted the AU official membership of the FOCAC and declared Africa a major partner in the BRI.³⁷ Like the EU, Beijing has established a diplomatic mission to the AU. As well as expanding Sino-African political relations, Beijing also represents an important economic partner for the African continent. This is illustrated by the establishment of a China Africa Development Fund and the rise of Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) to Africa, outlined in a specific White Paper on "China-Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation".³⁸ So far, however, overall Chinese FDI to Africa remains limited compared to that of the EU.³⁹

"Africa has played a key role in Beijing's efforts to reach out to the developing world"

Although Sino-African economic relations have expanded over the past years, the EU represents China's largest trading partner. Recent years have also seen an increase in Chinese FDI to Europe, reaching a peak in 2016.⁴⁰ This growing economic presence in Europe has provoked fears about Beijing taking over European

³⁰ Augustin-Jean, L. and Xie L., *Food safety, agro-industries, and China's international trade: A standard-based approach*, China Information, 2018, Vol. 32, No. 2, pp.400–422.

³¹ A. Beattie, *Technology: how the US, EU and China compete to set industry standards*, Financial Times, 24 July 2019.

³² R. Hasmath and J. Y. J. Hsu, *How Chinese Norms Are Going Global*, The Diplomat, 16 November 2019.

³³ Chinese State Council, *China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era*, Beijing, 10 January 2021.

³⁴ Rudyak, M., *The Ins and Outs of China's International Development Agency*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2 September 2019.; Cheng, C., *The Logic Behind China's Foreign Aid Agency*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21 May 2019.

³⁵ S. Mokry, *Europe cannot afford to ignore China's deepening influence in Africa*, Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), 25 June 2019.

³⁶ China Daily, *China's second Africa policy paper*, 5 December 2015.

³⁷ B. Ndzendze and S. Van Hoeymissen, *China and Africa's Integration Agenda: The Role of FOCAC*, ISPI Commentary, 27 September 2018.

³⁸ Chinese State Council, *China-Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation*, Beijing, August 2013.

³⁹ A. Garcia-Herrero and J. Xu, *China's investment in Africa: What the data really says, and the implications for Europe*, Bruegel, Blog Post, 22 July 2019.

⁴⁰ A. Kratz, M. Hutari, T. Hanemann, R. Arcesati, *Chinese FDI in Europe : 2019 Update*, Report, Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), 8 April 2020.

companies in strategically sensitive sectors, as well as distortions in the European single market caused by Chinese subsidies. These tensions have been amplified by China's so-called "wolf warrior" diplomacy, referring to the aggressive behaviour of Chinese officials using social media platforms to hit back directly at any criticism of the Chinese leadership.⁴¹ China's growing international assertiveness can be seen in **the context of the COVID-19 pandemic**, which originated there and quickly affected the rest of the world. In response to the pandemic, Chinese government officials and diplomats employed **strategic communication tools to systematically shape the international narrative** and alter global perceptions. At the same time, the pandemic has exposed some of China's fragility. As the legitimacy of the Chinese leadership rests on domestic economic development, a key priority for Beijing will be how to deal with the long-term economic repercussions of the COVID-19 crises at home.

"China's growing international assertiveness can be seen in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic"

1.3 A rising and fragile Africa

At the 2021 virtual Munich Security Conference, German Chancellor Angela Merkel highlighted the strategic importance of Africa.⁴² Since 2000, Africa has witnessed new economic dynamism, captured by the term **"Africa rising"**. It is the world's fastest-growing region population-wise. As the most natural **resource-rich continent**, it has attracted new trading partners such as China and India. Because Africa has the largest concentration of **young people** in the world, it also offers a large and expanding labour force.

"Africa has witnessed new economic dynamism"

Regional integration is key to Africa's development. Its division into more than 50 economic spatial units has been a major brake on the continent's development. Thus, eight regional bodies, so-called Regional Economic Communities (RECs)⁴³ have been established. Although these regional groupings of African states were conceived as building blocks for the African Union (AU), their contribution to Africa's economic integration has remained weak. Founded in 2002 and comprising 55 African members, the AU is the driving force of political and economic integration. Like the EU, it is composed of different bodies, such as a dedicated Peace and Security Council. With Agenda 2063,⁴⁴ the AU has drawn up a policy blueprint for transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future. A key flagship project of Agenda 2063 is the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which has been launched this year. It aims at growing intra-African trade and has the potential to become the largest free trade area since the WTO.⁴⁵

"The continent is faced with a number of obstacles"

Despite these growing opportunities, the continent is faced with a **number of obstacles**. First and foremost, sustaining Africa's **growth over a long period remains**

⁴¹ B. Westcott and S. Jiang, *China is embracing a new brand of foreign policy. Here's what wolf warrior diplomacy means*, CNN, 29 May 2020.

⁴² German Government, *Speech by Federal Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel during the Munich Security Conference Special Edition*, 19 February 2021.

⁴³ Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Southern African Development Community (SADC).

⁴⁴ African Union (AU), *Agenda 2063: The Africa we want*, September 2015.

⁴⁵ J. Crabtree, *Africa is on the verge of forming the largest free trade area since the WTO*, CNBC, 20 March 2018.

challenging for a number of reasons. Many African economies are exposed to commodity price volatility. Thus, since the 2014 drop in commodity prices, overall growth in Africa has been lower than in the previous decade.⁴⁶ The continent also suffers from an infrastructure deficit, which represents an obstacle to intra-African trade as well as to the region's integration into the global economy.⁴⁷ Africa currently invests only 4% of its collective GDP in infrastructure, a drop in the ocean compared with China's 14%.⁴⁸ Moreover, the continent is vulnerable to global warming and public health risks. Although Africa contributes least to global warming, it is the most **vulnerable region to climate change**. In addition, Africa's underlying burden of **endemic diseases** is the biggest in the world.⁴⁹ The 2014-2016 Ebola virus epidemic in West Africa has been a clear example. Recent cases in Guinea are causing anxiety about a new Ebola outbreak against the backdrop of the COVID-19 global pandemic.⁵⁰ Another major constraint on Africa's development is conflicts and state fragility. Africa hosts the largest number of fragile states.⁵¹ Armed conflicts threaten not only the lives of citizens and hamper the economic development of a country, but also generate significant regional and global negative spill-overs.

“Africa hosts the largest number of fragile states”

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed Africa's vulnerability to external shocks. Though initially it did not hit Africa as badly as expected, the continent is now facing a second wave.⁵² Cases have been surging and a new, more infectious variant of the virus has been discovered in South Africa. In addition to challenging weak health systems, the pandemic entails long-term socio-economic costs:⁵³ Africa is experiencing its first recession in decades.⁵⁴

“The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed Africa's vulnerability to external shocks”

In sum, the role of Africa, China and the EU in the contemporary international order varies and some of their interests compete. At the same time, the trio is faced with emerging global challenges that cannot be solved at national or regional levels.

⁴⁶ OECD, *Revenue Statistics in Africa 2020*, Paris, 12 November 2020.

⁴⁷ World Bank, *Africa's Infrastructure: A Time for Transformation*, Washington D.C., 2010.

⁴⁸ African Development Bank, *Annual Development Effectiveness Review 2013*, Tunisia, 2013.

⁴⁹ J. N. Nkengasong and S. K. Tessema, *Africa Needs a New Public Health Order to Tackle Infectious Disease Threats*, Cell, Vol. 183, Issue 2, October 2020, pp.296–300

⁵⁰ The Conversation, *Why Ebola is back in Guinea and why the response must be different this time*, 21 February 2021.

⁵¹ The Fund for Peace, *Fragile State Index 2020*

⁵² Y. Boum, *Covid-19 : L'Afrique affronte la second vague*, Institut Montaigne, 18 février 2021

⁵³ G. Gondwe, *Assessing the Impact of COVID-19 on Africa's Economic Development*, UNCTAD, July 2020.

⁵⁴ OECD, *Revenue Statistics in Africa 2020*, Paris, 12 November 2020.

2 EU, Africa, China trilateral cooperation: delivering global public goods

The current crisis has served as a reminder of the importance of **global public goods** (GPGs).⁵⁵ These are public goods that **transcend national and regional borders** and spread their costs and benefits across several generations.⁵⁶ As their provision grows in importance, the pandemic can propel a new approach to international cooperation.⁵⁷ While for a long time North-South cooperation constituted the prevailing model, **other forms of international action** (e.g. South-South cooperation⁵⁸ between Africa and China) have become increasingly prominent. At the same time, we are witnessing **decreasing multilateralism** due to growing big power rivalry (e.g. between the U.S. and China). The EU recently adopted a new Communication on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism,⁵⁹ which calls for new “non-traditional” coalitions and formats of international cooperation.

Consequently, a **new form of trilateral cooperation between the EU, Africa and China is needed for a post-COVID-19 world**. The agenda of this novel cooperation model has to be centred around the provision of global public goods. While the EU is clearly committed to supporting GPGs, China is still a relative newcomer in this area.⁶⁰ Experts stressed that while it used to be rare to hear Chinese leaders refer to GPG, China has moved from a cautious behaviour to a much more proactive role and is starting to position itself as a global GPG player.⁶¹

“The agenda of this novel cooperation model has to be centred around the provision of global public goods”

During the pandemic, both the EU and China have committed to making coronavirus vaccines and treatments global public goods. The COVID-19 crisis has also highlighted Africa's important contribution to GPGs. The region has extensive experience with infectious diseases. Drawing in particular on lessons from the Ebola epidemic, Africa not only responded swiftly to the coronavirus outbreak, but also made significant efforts in collective action.⁶² By launching a COVID-19 Response Fund for Africa and appointing Special Envoys to mobilise international economic support for Africa to fight the pandemic, the AU has been actively involved in negotiations on the best responses to it with the international community.

With the view of formulating an EU strategic cooperation agenda with Africa and China, the following sections will look more closely at the potential added value of this new form of trilateral cooperation. They will examine how the EU, Africa

⁵⁵ A. Izmestiev and S. Klingebiel, *International (development) cooperation in a post-COVID-19 world: a new way of interaction or super-accelerator?*, DevPolicy Blog, 1 May 2020

⁵⁶ I. Kaul, *Global Public Goods: A concept for framing the post-2015 agenda?*, German Development Institute (DIE), Discussion Paper 2/2013.

⁵⁷ A. Prizzon, *How coronavirus is accelerating a new approach to international cooperation*, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), 26 March 2020.

⁵⁸ *UN Office for South-South Cooperation*

⁵⁹ European Commission, *Joint Communication on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism*, Brussels 12 February 2021.

⁶⁰ M. Gavas, *The EU and Global Public Goods: Challenge and Opportunities*, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Report, 2013.

⁶¹ N. Grünberg and T. des Gartés Geddes, 5. *Delivering Global Public Goods*, Study, Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), 15 September 2020.

⁶² E. Sidiropoulos, *Are States Ready to Commit to Providing Global Public Goods?*, Blog, Institut Montaigne, 10 April 2020.

and China can work together to ensure the **effective delivery of GPDs in three specific policy fields: health, economic development, peace and security**. The three sectors have been selected on the basis of European, African and Chinese policy documents, as well as the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

There is also **potential for trilateral cooperation** in the fields of **climate change** and **energy**.⁶³ Although these issues would merit a distinct section, they will be examined in the section on economic development, because they are intrinsically connected to the global economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and international efforts to foster green growth.

2.1 Health

Health should be **at the top of the EU's strategic cooperation agenda** with Africa and China. **COVID-19** represents an **unprecedented international health emergency** and reaffirms the importance of global health.⁶⁴ In particular, the pandemic has highlighted the need to invest in GPGs for health in the long-term so we are prepared for future pandemics.

“Health should be at the top of the EU's strategic cooperation agenda with Africa and China”

The coronavirus was first detected in China's Hubei province at the end of 2019. While the outbreak was largely brought under control in China, the virus spread rapidly across Europe, Africa and the rest of the world. In March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak a global pandemic.⁶⁵ In an attempt to dissociate itself from the virus and to change the narrative, China engaged in a so-called “mask diplomacy”⁶⁶ in Europe and Africa, fuelling what Josep Borrell referred to as a “global battle of narratives”.⁶⁷

The supply of medical goods such as face masks to individual European member states, largely out of political goodwill, created geopolitical tensions between Brussels and Beijing. African leaders, on the other hand, by and large welcomed China's medical support. To demonstrate its willingness to support an international response to the virus, the Chinese leadership also adapted the BRI and strengthened its “**Health Silk Road**” component.⁶⁸ Beijing also contributed to international initiatives like the third Paris Peace Forum that focused on the collective response to the pandemic. On this occasion, President Xi called for international cooperation and made a commitment that Chinese vaccines will be a global public good.⁶⁹

⁶³ M. Weigel and A. Demissie, *A New Climate Trilateralism? Opportunities for Cooperation between the EU, China and African Countries on Addressing Climate Change*, Discussion Paper 8/2017, German Development Institute (DIE).

⁶⁴ I. Kaul and M. Faust, *Global public goods and health: taking the agenda forward*, Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 79 (9), pp. 869–874.

⁶⁵ WHO, *Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19*, 11 March 2020.

⁶⁶ A. Fuch et al., *China's mask diplomacy: Political and business ties facilitate access to critical medical good during the coronavirus pandemic*, VOXEU, 16 September 2020.

⁶⁷ J. Borrell, *The Coronavirus pandemic and the new world it is creating*, Statement, Brussels, 24 March 2020.

⁶⁸ J. Mardell, *China's "Health Silk Road": Adapting the BRI to a pandemic-era world*, Kurzanalyse, Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), 25 November 2020.

⁶⁹ Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Xi addresses 3rd Paris Peace Forum*, 12 November 2020.

Both the EU and China have displayed international solidarity during the COVID-19 health emergency.⁷⁰ As one response, the EU launched a **“Team Europe” global response to COVID-19 initiative**, with a particular focus on supporting African countries and the AU.⁷¹ Similarly, Beijing has offered international support to various countries, including in Africa. In June 2020, China and Africa held an extraordinary China-Africa Summit to foster solidarity against COVID-19, with AU participation.⁷² It was followed by more practical Sino-African cooperation in the public health sector, such as the construction of the China-funded headquarters of the AU’s African Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) in December that year.⁷³ In parallel, the EU and the AU launched a new partnership to scale up preparedness for health emergencies between the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and Africa CDC.⁷⁴ According to experts, **Africa’s COVID-19 response**, which has been led by the Africa CDC, **has been commendable**.⁷⁵ The Africa CDC was established in 2017 in the aftermath of the Ebola epidemic. It has implemented the AU’s continental strategy for COVID-19⁷⁶ and engaged with international partners. Despite growing Sino-European frictions, the pandemic has also resulted in some joint efforts in making the COVID-19 vaccine a global public good. For instance, China participated in the EU’s online pledging event to fund the development of a vaccine against COVID-19 in May.⁷⁷

Alongside individual policy initiatives by the EU, China and Africa, we have seen the emergence of international responses to the pandemic. The **World Health Organisation** has been **at the centre of the international health crisis**. It has faced major criticism regarding its handling of the pandemic, not only by the U.S. under Trump, but also other countries like the UK, Canada and Australia.⁷⁸ The WHO’s Director-General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the first African in this position, was repeatedly accused of being too soft on China.⁷⁹ While several WHO members complained about China’s lack of transparency,⁸⁰ Dr Tedros warned of the dangers of politicising the virus and was backed by the AU.⁸¹ At the same time, the EU tried to strengthen the WHO’s international crisis response. Although the EU – together with its member states – is already its biggest financial contributor, Josep Borrell has stressed that **“we need a WHO with more resources and capacity for action”**.⁸²

“The World Health Organisation has been at the centre of the international health crisis”

⁷⁰ N. Koenig and A. Stahl, *How the coronavirus pandemic affects the EU’s geopolitical agenda*, Policy Paper, Jacques Delors Centre, 24 March 2020.

⁷¹ Council of the EU, *“Team Europe” global response to COVID-19: Council welcomes the mobilization of almost €36 billion and approves conclusions*, Press release, Brussels, 8 June 2020.

⁷² Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Joint Statement of the Extraordinary China-Africa Summit on Solidarity Against COVID-19*, Beijing, 17 June 2020.

⁷³ Xinhua, *Construction of China-aided Africa CDC HQ commences in Ethiopia*, 14 December 2020.

⁷⁴ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ecdc), *EU and AU sign partnership to scale up preparedness for health emergencies*, 7 December 2020.

⁷⁵ A. Uche Ordu, *The coming of age of the Africa Centers for Disease Control*, Brookings, 15 April 2020.

⁷⁶ African Union (AU), *Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Outbreak*, Addis Ababa, 20 March 2020.

⁷⁷ Deutsche Welle, *World leaders pledge €7.4 billion for European Commission’s coronavirus vaccine fundraising conference*, 4 May 2020.

⁷⁸ Peter Beaumont, *UK and US criticise WHO’s Covid report and accuse China of withholding data*, The Guardian, 30 March 2021.

⁷⁹ S. Buranyi, *The WHO v coronavirus: why it can’t handle the pandemic*, The Guardian, 10 April 2020.

⁸⁰ C. Yik-wai, *Western calls for greater Chinese transparency on the coronavirus reflect a clash of culture*, Opinion, South China Morning Post, 30 April 2020.

⁸¹ France 24, *AU chief defends WHO from Trump’s criticism*, 8 April 2020.

⁸² J. Borrell, *European Foreign Policy in Times of COVID-19*, European External Action Service (EEAS), 2021.

To strengthen the UN agency's crisis management role, the EU has played a significant role in the adoption of a landmark WHO resolution of May 2020 foreseeing an independent expert mission to China to look into the origins of COVID-19.⁸³ The EU also supported the launch of the WHO's Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator designed to facilitate access to COVID-19 health products around the world. In this context, the vaccine pillar COVAX won plaudits: it represents an international mechanism that should provide for an equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines among the participating countries. For Africa, the COVAX Facility aims to provide 600 million doses to the continent by the end of 2021.⁸⁴ Despite its political announcement to make vaccines GPG, Beijing was initially hesitant to lend support and only joined COVAX in October 2020.⁸⁵

Even so, ensuring equal access to COVID-19 vaccines remains fraught. There is a major risk of vaccine nationalism. In the **global race for COVID-19 vaccines**, the EU has signed collective contracts for vaccines with European and U.S.-based pharmaceutical companies. In parallel, China developed its own COVID-19 vaccines. Unlike the EU and China, Africa does not have large-scale vaccine manufacturing capability. The WHO thus warns that the continent is in danger of being left behind in the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines as countries in other regions strike vaccine deals.⁸⁶ When combining the vaccines provided by the COVAX Facility and the doses ordered by the AU, the number of doses reserved for Africa would amount to 1.27 billion.⁸⁷ The continent would, however, require many more doses to immunise 60% of its population, the threshold for herd immunity. Africa is therefore forced to find alternative vaccine supplies, including from China.⁸⁸ Morocco has received a first shipment of Chinese vaccines.⁸⁹ Due to the slow rollout of the EU's vaccine programme, European countries also started purchasing vaccines from China. Hungary was the first to use vaccines produced by the Chinese laboratory Sinopharm.⁹⁰ This is viewed with scepticism by the EU. On the one hand, China has been criticised for lack of transparency about its own vaccine manufacturers. Some medical experts have questioned the safety of China's vaccines due to Beijing's unwillingness to release any trial results.⁹¹ In addition, given the lack of transparency surrounding the vaccine procurement process, the EU fears that Beijing is weaponising vaccine diplomacy as a tool for global power projection. As a consequence, **Africa risks being squeezed by Chinese and European vaccine geopolitics.**⁹²

“There is a major risk of vaccine nationalism”

⁸³ WHO, *COVID-19 response*, Draft resolution, Seventy-third World Health Assembly, 18 May 2020.

⁸⁴ WHO, *COVAX expects to start sending millions of COVID-19 vaccine to Africa in February*, Press release, 4 February 2021.

⁸⁵ H. Adlakha, *Did China Join COVAX to Counter or Promote Vaccine Nationalism?*, *The Diplomat*, 23 October 2020.

⁸⁶ Deutsche Welle, *Africa lags in COVID-19 vaccination drive*, 22 January 2021.

⁸⁷ WHO, *COVAX expects to start sending millions of COVID-19 vaccine to Africa in February*, Press release, 4 February 2021.

⁸⁸ J. Campell, *Vaccine Diplomacy: China and SinoPharm in Africa*, Council on Foreign Relations, 6 January 2021.

⁸⁹ Asharq Al-Awsat, *Morocco Receives 1st Shipment of Chinese COVID-19 Vaccine*, 28 January 2021.

⁹⁰ Euronews, *Hungary becomes first EU nation to use China's Sinopharm vaccine against COVID-19*, 26 February 2021.

⁹¹ S-L. Wee, *Chinese Covid-19 Vaccine Gets Key Push but Doubts Swirl*, *The New York Times*, 9 December 2020.

⁹² Z. Usman, *Vaccine Geopolitics Could Derail Africa's Post-Pandemic Recovery*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 24 February 2021.

Along with vaccine nationalism, intellectual property rights (IP) constitute an obstacle to equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. Via IP, pharmaceutical companies retain monopoly control of their products and can raise prices, seemingly at will. While AstraZeneca has charged the EU less than 2 USD per dose, Thailand has to pay around 5 USD per dose.⁹³ To ensure that COVID-19 medical products are accessible to poor countries, the WHO established a voluntary pool for companies to share their IP.⁹⁴ The EU has supported this initiative.⁹⁵ Yet, for many developing countries in Africa, it does not go far enough. Together with India, South Africa called on the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to suspend intellectual property rights related to COVID-19 vaccines and medicines. They proposed a waiver for certain parts of the WTO Treaty protecting IP at global level, the so-called Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).⁹⁶ Concerns in developing countries that patent rules might restrict their access to affordable medicines are not new. Together with the U.S., the EU has so far opposed the TRIPS waiver proposal on grounds of protecting the European pharmaceutical industry. China, meanwhile, welcomed the proposal but sought more time to assess legal and economic aspects, particularly on efforts by its own pharma companies for development of COVID-19 vaccines.⁹⁷

2.2 Economic Development

COVID-19 also represents an **unprecedented disruption to the global economy**. The lockdown measures depress economic growth and the global economic context deteriorated in 2020. The pandemic thus calls for both medical and economic solutions. To prepare for a post-COVID-19 world order, the **EU's strategic cooperation agenda** with Africa and China should **pay particular attention to global economic recovery and sustainable development**.

While the overall economic outlook remains highly uncertain, UNCTAD data shows that the long-term economic effects of the pandemic are likely to be uneven across the EU, Africa and China.⁹⁸ To support economic recovery, the EU adopted an unprecedented stimulus package called "Next Generation EU".⁹⁹ Yet, despite this €750 billion fund, the IMF expects China to be more successful at steering its economy through the pandemic and to emerge as a central player in the post-COVID 19 world economy.¹⁰⁰ The situation in Africa is most alarming. According to OECD projections, **Africa will experience its first recession in decades as a result of the pandemic** and millions could face extreme poverty.¹⁰¹

"The EU's strategic cooperation agenda with Africa and China should pay particular attention to global economic recovery and sustainable development"

⁹³ B. Kuruvilla, *Waive the patents, defeat the pandemic*, IPS Journal, 3 February 2021.

⁹⁴ E. Silverman, *The WHO launched a voluntary Covid-19 product pool. What happens next?*, STAT, 29 May 2020.

⁹⁵ E. Silverman, *EU urges the World Health Assembly to pursue a voluntary pool for Covid-19 products*, STAT, 16 April 2020.

⁹⁶ A. D. Usher, *South Africa and India push for COVID-19 patents ban*, The Lancet, Vol. 396, Issue 10265, pp. 1790–1791, December 2020.

⁹⁷ A. Bhaumik, *China, Pakistan support India's call for patent-free Covid-19 vaccine at WTO; US, EU oppose*, Deccan Herald, 21 November 2020.

⁹⁸ UNCTAD, *Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Trade and Development*, New York, 2020.

⁹⁹ European Commission, *Recovery plan for Europe*, Brussels, May 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Financial Times, *IMF expects US and China to recover most strongly from virus economic hit*, 26 January 2021.

¹⁰¹ OECD, *Revenue Statistics in Africa 2020*, Paris, 12 November 2020.

In response to COVID-19, several African countries have adopted stimulus packages.¹⁰² To finance these measures, African states have to reallocate existing budgets, take out loans and obtain debt relief from creditors.¹⁰³ While these COVID-19 stimulus packages support immediate short-term responses to the crisis, long-term solutions are needed to mitigate its economic impact and promote smart, inclusive and sustainable economic development in Africa. This requires support from the EU and China.

The EU does not enjoy an economic monopoly in Africa anymore. While it remains Africa's leading economic partner, Sino-African trade and investment relations have deepened considerably over the past years. Through the BRI, **China plays an important role in African infrastructure development** and contributes to expanding transportation networks, port facilities and telecommunications infrastructure. Following the establishment of the AIIB in 2016, a number of African countries have joined the Bank.¹⁰⁴ Yet, the AIIB's forays into Africa have been quite modest so far.¹⁰⁵ Like China, the EU has put greater focus on infrastructure development in Africa over the past years. As EU-Africa relations are moving away from the traditional donor-recipient model, **the EU has started to leverage more private investments in Africa**. As part of this process, the EU has expanded the role of European financial institutions like the EIB and launched new instruments such as the European External Investment Plan, aimed at using public monies to leverage private finance for sustainable development.¹⁰⁶

As the conditions that sustained high rates of lending for infrastructure development in Africa have changed dramatically due to a fall in commodity prices and the outbreak of COVID-19, **Africa is facing a debt crisis**. Alongside the EU and its member states, China has emerged as a top lender to the continent. To respond to the explosion in African countries' debt, Beijing engaged in bilateral negotiations with its African debtors. In this context, experts have highlighted that an "uncoordinated approach to debt management by international creditors is producing negative effects in the short term"¹⁰⁷ and could undermine Africa's long-term industrialisation efforts. The EU's invitation to China to join the collective debt re-scheduling process organised within the G20 should therefore be welcomed. It has enabled the AU, through its Special Envoys for COVID-19, to jointly negotiate with all G20 countries and laid the ground for an international approach on debt relief efforts for African countries.¹⁰⁸

While a moratorium on debt repayments for African countries is a first step, this initiative is only a tiny part of the solution. As highlighted by the EU's recent trade

"Africa is facing a debt crisis"

¹⁰² H. Bhorat and T. Köhler, *Lockdown economics in South Africa: Social assistance and the Ramaphosa stimulus package*, Brookings 20 November 2020.

¹⁰³ S. Raga and B. Housseini, *The evolving fiscal and liquidity stimulus packages in response to COVID-19 in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), 20 October 2020.

¹⁰⁴ C. Prinsloo, *AIIB Membership for African Countries: Drawcards and Drawbacks*, Global Policy, 13 September 2019.

¹⁰⁵ E. C. Olander, *More African Countries Are Now Members of the AIIB But It's Still Very Much an ASIAN Development Bank*, The ChinaAfrica Project, 30 July 2020

¹⁰⁶ S. Große-Puppenthal and S. Bilal, *What is the European External Investment Plan really about?*, Briefing Note no. 101, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), March 2018.

¹⁰⁷ C. Alden, *China and Africa: Debt, Development and Geopolitics*, Commentary, ISPI, 24 July 2020.

¹⁰⁸ Council of the EU, *Debt relief efforts for African countries: Council approves conclusions*, Press release, 30 November 2020.

strategy, **trade plays an important role in long-term global economic recovery.**¹⁰⁹ The pandemic has increased the risk of protectionism. While unilateral trade restrictions can provide short-term relief during periods of economic downturn, they generally provoke retaliation, create supply shortages and price hikes in international markets. Trade protectionism can also increase imbalances in the recovery process and thereby exacerbate existing inequalities between African countries and the rest of the world.

The EU's trade policy document underlines the importance of commercial relations with Africa and China as well as the need for multilateralism.¹¹⁰ The launch of the **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)** also represents an **important global game-changer** and could strengthen EU-Africa and China-Africa trade relations.¹¹¹ By lowering trade costs across the region, the AfCFTA would not only foster African regional integration and increase the continent's resilience to future shocks, but also serve as a positive example for cross-border trade cooperation in an era of growing isolationism. While EU-China trade relations are fraught, Brussels remains committed to active engagement with Beijing, along with developing autonomous instruments necessary to protect the EU's essential interests and values.¹¹² This approach has been referred to as the EU's so-called "open strategic autonomy".¹¹³ The signature of the **EU-China Investment Agreement (CAI)**¹¹⁴ represents a tangible example of this approach. As experts have underlined, the CAI can play an important role in the recovery of the global economy in the post-pandemic era by further eliminating investment and trade barriers between China and Europe.¹¹⁵ Moreover, the CAI sends an important political message: the EU's commitment to cooperate with China in building a rules-based economic order.

"The CAI can play an important role in the recovery of the global economy in the post-pandemic era"

Considering the power imbalance between Africa, the EU and China, only a rules-based multilateral trading system will ensure that the COVID-19 global economic recovery will not exacerbate existing inequalities. Thus, **the WTO**, which is responsible for regulating international trade, needs to play a critical role in facilitating the recovery. Over recent years, the WTO's main functions have been eroded and the organisation is faced with an existential crisis. The election of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as the first African and woman to lead it could allow for a fresh start.¹¹⁶ The new Director-General announced that her main priority would be to drive forward the urgently required fundamental reform of the organisation.¹¹⁷ Various

¹⁰⁹ European Commission, Communication, *Trade Policy review – An Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy*, Brussels, 18 February 2021.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ C. Kende-Robb, *6 reasons why Africa's new free trade area is a global game changer*, World Economic Forum, 9 February 2021.

¹¹² European Commission, Communication, *Trade Policy review – An Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy*, Brussels, 18 February 2021.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ European Commission, *EU and China reach agreement in principle on investment*, Brussel, 30 December 2020.

¹¹⁵ L. Wang, *The negotiation of EU-China comprehensive agreement on investment and its potential impact in the post-pandemic era*, *Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies*, Vol. 18(4), pp.1–8, January 2021.

¹¹⁶ D. Palmer and S. A. Aarup, *New WTO chief faces rough road ahead*, Politico, 14 February 2021.

¹¹⁷ WTO, *Statement of Director-General Elect Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala to the Special Session of the WTO General Council*, Geneva, 13 February 2021.

proposals for reform exist.¹¹⁸ Most of these are aimed at addressing the impasse in the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism (DSM) and in particular the deadlock on the Appellate Body, the main forum for settling worldwide trade disagreements.

As a result of the U.S. blockage of the Appellate Body under President Trump, Sino-American trade relations have been conducted outside the WTO. With a view to safeguarding the WTO's role, the EU proposed last year a temporary solution to ensure that the DSM would remain functional despite the impasse on the Appellate Body.¹¹⁹ The initiative was supported by China, which is the third most active member within the DSS (behind the US and EU).¹²⁰ The EU's recent trade policy document further underlines its commitment to restore a fully functioning WTO dispute settlement with a reformed Appellate Body. It also offers a detailed plan for WTO reform. This recognises China's indispensable role in any reform process, as well as the need to engage in a dialogue with African countries on the reform agenda.¹²¹

Alongside multilateral institutions like the WTO, **public development banks** in China, Africa and Europe can make a meaningful contribution to lasting economic development in a post-COVID-19 world. For the implementation of the BRI, Beijing established the Multilateral Cooperation Center for Development Finance. The MCDF involves more than the AIIB – it facilitates coordination with international development banks.¹²² The “Finance in Common” Summit held in November 2020 also drew attention to the unique role of development banks in the global economic system and their contribution to sustainable development. Both Chinese and African representatives participated in the world's first development bank summit hosted by France and the UN.¹²³

As Ursula von der Leyen has reminded us, “climate change is the looming crisis behind COVID-19”.¹²⁴ The long-term socio-economic consequences of COVID-19 can only be addressed through a **green recovery**, which will require increased global efforts to combat climate change. The **EU and China** are among the world's top greenhouse gas (GHGs) emitters and have engaged in **climate change mitigation**. Both signed the 2015 Paris Agreement, which is the first-ever universal, legally binding global climate change accord. Under the Paris Agreement, all countries agreed to take collective action on climate change to keep the rise in global temperature to no more than 2°C by the end of this century. While China accounts for 23% of global warming and the EU for 13%, Africa emits just 3.8% of GHGs.¹²⁵

“The EU and China are among the world's top greenhouse gas emitters”

¹¹⁸ S. Akman et al., *The need for WTO reform: Where to start in governing world trade?*, T2o Policy Brief, 20 November 2020.

¹¹⁹ European Commission, *EU and 16 WTO members agree to work together on an interim appeal arbitration arrangement*, Davos, 24 January 2020.

¹²⁰ Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), *How Influential is China in the World Trade Organization?*, China Power Project, August 2020.

¹²¹ European Commission, *Annex, to the Communication Trade Policy review – An Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy*, Brussels, 18 February 2021.

¹²² Calabrese, L. and Chen, Y., *Broadening the Belt and Road: China's new fund for multilateral cooperation*, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), 15 September 2020.

¹²³ Finance in Common, *Joint Declaration of all Public Development Banks in the World*, Paris, 12 November 2020.

¹²⁴ European Commission, *Speech by President von der Leyen at the Special Edition 2021 of the Munich Security Conference*, Brussels, 19 February 2021.

¹²⁵ C. Golubski, *Even before the U.S. left the Paris Agreement, Africa stepped up to the plate on climate change*, Brookings, 2 June 2017.

Even so, Africa faces exponential collateral damages of global warming such as droughts that cause major economic losses. Thus, **climate adaptation** is a **key priority for Africa**. In its new Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change, the EU therefore calls for more international action on climate adaptation and better cooperation with Africa.¹²⁶ As the Paris Agreement goes beyond climate change mitigation to envisage support for adaptation measures, it has strong relevance for African countries.¹²⁷ Moreover, as signatories of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, **the EU, Africa and China** are committed to help deliver it.

Digitalisation can be a **driver of economic development** and COVID-19 has been a catalyst for the world's digital transformation. At the same time, the current crisis is also a stark reminder of the remaining **digital divide**. The African continent does not have the same access to/distribution of information and communication technologies (ICT) as the EU and China. The AU adopted a digital strategy to promote this in 2019.¹²⁸ While digitalisation and smart economic development can play a vital role in supporting the post pandemic recovery, strategies are needed to mitigate the digital divide between Africa and China/EU.

As part of the BRI, **China** launched a **Digital Silk Road (DSR)** in 2015, offering financing for ICT to support digital connectivity between countries along that pathway.¹²⁹ Since the 1990s, Chinese ICT groups have been extending their overseas influence.¹³⁰ While the EU's 5G toolbox¹³¹ suggests limiting the involvement of the Chinese telecoms giant Huawei in Europe's 5G rollout, Chinese firms have built much of Africa's digital infrastructure.¹³² China is not only involved in basic ICT hardware in Africa, but also supports different IT projects, such as the AU's digital health project "smart health monitoring room".¹³³

Like China, the **EU** has identified the digital economy as an important driver of growth. In 2010, it introduced the concept of **smart growth** to make full use of ICT for economic development.¹³⁴ The recently adopted "**Digital Compass**" defines EU digital ambitions for 2030.¹³⁵ Its focus is not only on the digital transformation of European businesses, but also on promoting international partnerships to strengthen connectivity between the EU and its partners. Through its **2018 Connectivity Strategy**, the EU formulated a first digital cooperation strategy **with Asia**.¹³⁶

"Africa faces exponential collateral damages of global warming"

"COVID-19 has been a catalyst for the world's digital transformation"

¹²⁶ European Commission, Communication, *Forging a climate-resilient Europe – the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change*, Brussels, 24 February 2021.

¹²⁷ R. Munang and R. Mgendi, *The Paris climate deal and Africa*, Africa Renewal, April 2016.

¹²⁸ African Union (AU), 2019 Sharm El Sheikh Declaration, *Specialized Technical Committee on Communication and Information Technologies*, 22–26 October 2019.

¹²⁹ Council on Foreign Relations, *Assessing China's Digital Silk Road Initiative*.

¹³⁰ R. Arcesati, *The Digital Silk Road is a development issue*, Short analysis, Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), 28 April 2020.

¹³¹ European Commission, "Cybersecurity of 5G networks: EU Toolbox of risk mitigation measures", Brussels, 29 January 2020.

¹³² Deutsche Welle, *Investing in Africa's tech infrastructure. Has China won already?*, 3 May 2019.

¹³³ African Union (AU), *AU Commission Launches Smart Health Monitoring System*, Addis Ababa, 26 October 2017.

¹³⁴ European Commission, Communication, *EUROPE 2020 – A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, Brussels, 3 March 2010.

¹³⁵ European Commission, Communication, *2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade*, Brussels, 3 March 2021.

¹³⁶ European Commission, Communication, *Connecting Europe and Asia – Building blocks for an EU Strategy*, Brussels, 19 September 2018.

The 2020 digital strategy further reinforced the EU's global digital agenda and put particular emphasis on digital cooperation with Africa.¹³⁷ The EU-AU Digital Economy Task Force (DETF), launched in 2018, provides an important platform for digital cooperation between the EU and Africa.¹³⁸ Through the DETF, the EU supports the digital transformation in Africa, including the creation of a single African Digital Market.¹³⁹ In addition, the EU has started to mainstream digital technologies into EU development policy and launched **Digital4development**.¹⁴⁰ Yet, as experts have noted, EU digital support for Africa lags behind China's.¹⁴¹

While **digitalisation** can be a **driver of economic development in Africa**, it does not come without risks. Given its technological rise, Beijing is strengthening its authoritarian model of digital development, based on censorship, automated surveillance systems¹⁴² and disinformation campaigns.¹⁴³ Moreover, China is starting to set new global standards in technology.¹⁴⁴ There is a risk that China's digital authoritarianism could undermine civil liberties in Africa,¹⁴⁵ as well as threaten European democracy.¹⁴⁶ The adoption of the EU's Digital Compass demonstrates the EU's ambition to formulate an alternative human-centred digital agenda on the global stage, vested in values such as openness. Africa should play an important role within that and could benefit from the EU's forthcoming Global Digital Cooperation Strategy.¹⁴⁷

Digitalisation needs to go hand in hand with social equity. In Africa, the sectoral impact of COVID-19 has been and will likely continue to be varied.¹⁴⁸ This presents African governments with the opportunity to restructure their economies. Thus, they need to put more effort into drawing up more inclusive economic development plans. The EU and China are faced with the same challenge of achieving inclusive economic growth in the post-COVID-19 era and avoid deepening inequalities.

“Digitalisation needs to go hand in hand with social equity”

2.3 Peace and Security

Much of the current call for global cooperation focuses on the need to contain the pandemic and its economic impact. Yet, peace and security is another policy area commanding joint **long-term responses** by the EU, Africa and China. As con-

¹³⁷ European Commission, Communication, *Shaping Europe's digital future*, Brussels, 19 February 2020.

¹³⁸ European Commission, Report, *New Africa-Europe Digital Economy Partnership – report of the EU-AU Digital Economy Task Force*, Brussels, 13 June 2019.

¹³⁹ European Commission, Communication, *Shaping Europe's digital future*, Brussels, 19 February 2020.

¹⁴⁰ European Commission, Staff working document, *Digital4Development: mainstreaming digital technologies and services into EU Development Policy*, 2 May 2017. Brussels

¹⁴¹ R. Arcesati, *The Digital Silk Road is a development issue*, Short analysis, Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), 28 April 2020.

¹⁴² A. L. Dahir, *China “gifted” the African Union a headquarters building and then allegedly bugged it for state secrets*, Quartz Africa, 30 January 2018.

¹⁴³ A. Shahbaz, *The Rise of Digital Authoritarianism*, Freedom House, 2018.

¹⁴⁴ J. Kynge and N. Liu, *How China is setting new global rules in technology that would make George Orwell blush*, Financial Post, 23 October 2020.

¹⁴⁵ I. Gagliardone, *The Impact of Chinese Tech Provision on Civil Liberties in Africa*, South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), Policy Insights No. 99, December 2020.

¹⁴⁶ Radio Free Europe, *EU: Russia, China Undermine Democracy with Coronavirus Disinformation*, 10 June 2020.

¹⁴⁷ European Commission, Communication, *Shaping Europe's digital future*, Brussels, 19 February 2020.

¹⁴⁸ A. Were, *The sectoral and gendered impacts of COVID-19 in Africa*, OECD Development matters, 11 February 2021.

licts cross national and regional borders, peace and security have become core global public goods.¹⁴⁹

Although Africa has made great progress in reducing the number of violent conflicts since the end of the Cold War, the **nature of security threats has fundamentally changed** and most African conflicts have been increasingly internationalised.¹⁵⁰ In today's globally connected world, violent conflicts and security threats in Africa easily translate into major global challenges. It thus comes as no surprise that at this year's Munich Security Conference both German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron stressed the strategic significance of Africa and the need to resolve ongoing conflicts in Libya and the Sahel.

As **peace and security** has been singled out as the **most pressing challenge for sustainable development for the African continent**, it has topped the **AU's agenda** from its inception in 2002. Unlike its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity, the AU was given a comprehensive mandate to maintain peace and security, based on the right to militarily intervene in a third state for humanitarian reasons. To provide the required long-term structural response to the peace and security challenges on its continent, the AU established together with the RECs the **African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)**.¹⁵¹ Set to work in 2004, APSA is the central framework encompassing a set of institutions, laws and instruments to contribute to conflict resolution and stabilisation.¹⁵² The African Standby Force, a continental peacekeeping force under AU direction, is a key APSA component.¹⁵³

A key issue facing APSA arises from the limited availability of AU resources. Although a mechanism to finance the AU has been introduced, it and the APSA remain dependent on external support.¹⁵⁴ The EU has offered major financial assistance to the APSA. Through its African Peace Facility, the EU provided €2.9 billion for 2004–2019.¹⁵⁵ Under the new EU budget for 2021–2027, this has been replaced by new financial instruments, namely the **European Peace Facility (EPF)** and the Neighbourhood, Development, International Cooperation instrument (NDICI). Unlike the African Peace Facility, the EPF will allow the EU to supply arms, including lethal weapons, to its African partners.¹⁵⁶ The new European security instrument remains controversial.¹⁵⁷ In a joint statement, several European and African civil

“The nature of security threats has fundamentally changed”

“Peace and security has been singled out as the most pressing challenge for sustainable development for the African continent”

¹⁴⁹ F. A. Baig et al., *Global security as a public good: a call to action for the international community*, World Bank Blog, 25 June 2020.

¹⁵⁰ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *SIPRI Yearbook 2020*, 7. Armed conflict and peace, Oxford University Press.

¹⁵¹ African Union (AU), *African Peace And Security Architecture (APSA) 2010 Assessment Study*, Peace and Security Department, 2010.

¹⁵² J. Grebe and M. Schuldes, *Quo Vadis APSA? The Future of the African Peace and Security Architecture*, Security Policy Working Paper, No. 25/2018, Federal Academy for Security Policy.

¹⁵³ N. C. Ani, *Is the African Standby Force any closer to being deployed?*, ISS Today, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), 2 November 2018.

¹⁵⁴ P. Apiko and L. Miyandazi, *Self-financing the African Union: One levy, multiple reforms*, ECDPM paper, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), September 2019,

¹⁵⁵ V. Hauck and L. T. Shiferaw, *How can we judge the AU-EU partnership on peace and security?*, ECDPM Great Insights, Vol. 9, Issue 3, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), 26 October 2020.

¹⁵⁶ P. Morcos and D. Ruy, *A European Peace Facility to Bolster European Foreign Policy?*, Commentary, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2 February 2021.

¹⁵⁷ Saferworld, *Weapons for peace? What to expect in 2021 from the EU's new 'peace facility'*, 11 January 2021.

society organisations have highlighted the risks of the EPF fuelling conflict and instability in Africa.¹⁵⁸ As the details of EPF allocations should be addressed in consultation with the AU, the forthcoming EU-Africa summit could represent a good venue for addressing some of these concerns.

Despite its foreign policy of non-interference, China's security role in Africa has expanded considerably over recent years.¹⁵⁹ The establishment of the **China-Africa Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Security** in 2012 added security issues to the FOCAC agenda and marked a turning point in the China-Africa relationship.¹⁶⁰ The shift in Sino-African security relations can be explained by Beijing's need to protect its broadening interests in Africa, such as safeguarding its investments or ensuring the safety of the surging number of Chinese citizens in Africa.¹⁶¹ As a consequence of its economic ascendancy and its military-industrial modernisation, China has become the world's second-largest arms producer and an important supplier to the African continent.¹⁶² To better protect its security interests far away from its shores, China established in 2017 its first and only overseas military base in Djibouti.¹⁶³ At the same time, the Chinese leadership has become aware of the fact that supporting Africa in creating a peaceful environment can serve China's broader diplomatic interests. Beijing thus presents Chinese security engagement in Africa as an example of South-South solidarity.¹⁶⁴ While China remains averse to direct military intervention in Africa and has been engaged in conflict mediation in countries like Sudan, it has also expanded its bilateral military cooperation with different African countries, for instance through military assistance, training and formal dialogues like the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, China has become involved in UN peacekeeping in Africa and established a peace and security partnership with the AU.¹⁶⁶ As part of AU-China cooperation, China is supporting the African Standby Force and made contributions to the AU's mission in Somalia.¹⁶⁷ Peace and security issues have also become an important aspect of China's Belt and Road Initiative.¹⁶⁸ The BRI runs through many fragile and conflict-affected areas, including Africa. By offering additional investments and aid, China is affecting the sensitive security context of fragile states in Africa. There is the risk that the BRI increases political and ethnic tensions that can lead to violence.

“China’s security role in Africa has expanded considerably over recent years”

“China has become involved in UN peacekeeping in Africa”

¹⁵⁸ Joint Civil Society Statement, *European ‘Peace’ Facility: Causing harm or bringing peace?*, November 2020.

¹⁵⁹ T. Bayes, *China’s growing security role in Africa: Views from West Africa, Implications for Europe*, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), 2020.

¹⁶⁰ Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Fifth Ministerial Conference of FOCAC opens further China-Africa cooperation*, 23 July 2012.

¹⁶¹ C. Alden, *Seeking security in Africa: China’s evolving approach to the African Peace and Security Architecture*, Report, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center (NOREF), March 2014., S. H. Zerba, *China’s Libya Evacuation Operation: a new diplomatic imperative – overseas citizen protection*, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 23, Issue 90, pp.1093-1112, April 2014.

¹⁶² Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *New SIPRI data reveals scale of Chinese arms industry*, 27 January 2020.

¹⁶³ J-P. Cabestan, *China’s Djibouti naval base increasing its power*, *East Asia Forum*, 16 May 2020.

¹⁶⁴ A. R. Lema, *China in Africa’s Peace and Security Landscape*, *The Diplomat*, 12 December 2019.

¹⁶⁵ M. Kovrig, *China Expands Its Peace and Security Footprint in Africa*, *Commentary*, International Crisis Group, 24 October 2018.

¹⁶⁶ R. Gowan, *China’s pragmatic approach to UN peacekeeping*, *Article*, Brookings, 14 September 2020.

¹⁶⁷ African Union (AU), *Signing of Agreements between the African Union and the People’s Republic of China*, Press Release, Addis Ababa, 10 May 2020.

¹⁶⁸ Saferworld, *Belt and road: What does China’s ‘project of the century’ mean for peace and security?*, 8 October 2018.

Against this background of China's growing security engagement in Africa, some coordination with the EU has taken place. Within the EU's counter-piracy naval operation Atalanta, the Chinese navy has conducted escort missions for World Food Programme shipments to Somalia.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, the EU launched in 2012 a dialogue with Africa and China on conventional arms controls.¹⁷⁰ It was followed in 2019 by another trilateral dialogue on preventing the diversion of arms and ammunition in Africa.¹⁷¹ This Track II diplomacy project is run by Saferworld, in collaboration with a Nairobi-based and a Beijing-based partner.¹⁷² On the basis of a non-governmental Expert Working Group format, it explores coordinated efforts by the EU, Africa and China to reduce the proliferation and misuse of arms, in particular small arms and light weapons (SALW).¹⁷³ So far, the experts have implemented practical actions in Burkina Faso, South Sudan and South Africa to help address the diversion of arms and ammunition in Africa.

Africa's security is closely intertwined with European and Chinese economic interests. As Chinese and European companies have expanded their supply chains into the continent, Africa has witnessed a greater integration into **global value chains**. While the growth of international supply chains has economically benefited Africa, it has come with damaging effects related to human and labour rights violations. Multinational companies were long encouraged to take responsibility for their supply chains on a voluntary basis. As this has proved insufficient, a **debate on mandatory human rights supply chain due diligence** is gaining momentum.

“Africa's security is closely intertwined with European and Chinese economic interests”

As highlighted by a report from Amnesty International, valuable minerals are driving conflicts in Africa and countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo are confronted with major human rights violations in the mining sector.¹⁷⁴ The report points out that both European but and Chinese companies are involved in these violations. In response, the EU has adopted binding legislation and voluntary initiatives to address human rights in the sectors traditionally worst affected, namely extractive industries. The EU's conflict minerals regulation lays down supply chain due diligence obligations on importers of tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold originating from conflict-riven areas.¹⁷⁵ Following the recent initiative by Germany to initiate a national supply chain law that obliges German companies to take action against human rights violations by their foreign suppliers, the EU has begun drafting an Action Plan to promote human rights in global supply chains.¹⁷⁶ This European supply chain law is due to be tabled in spring 2021.¹⁷⁷

¹⁶⁹ European External Action Service (EEAS), *Chinese Warship Escorts World Food Programme*, 12 February 2018.

¹⁷⁰ Council of the EU, *Council Decision (CFSP) 2012/121 in support of activities to promote EU-China-Africa dialogue and cooperation on conventional arms controls*, Brussels, 27 February 2012.

¹⁷¹ Council of the EU, *Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/1298 in support of an Africa-China-Europe dialogue and cooperation on preventing the diversion of arms and ammunition in Africa*, Brussels, 31 July 2019.

¹⁷² *Trilateral dialogue project on preventing the diversion of arms and ammunition in Africa*.

¹⁷³ Saferworld, SRIC, CACDA, *Tackling the illicit trade and diversion of arms and ammunition into and within Africa: the role of China-Africa cooperation*, November 2020.

¹⁷⁴ Amnesty International, *“This is what we die for” Human rights abuses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo power the global trade in cobalt*, London, 2016.

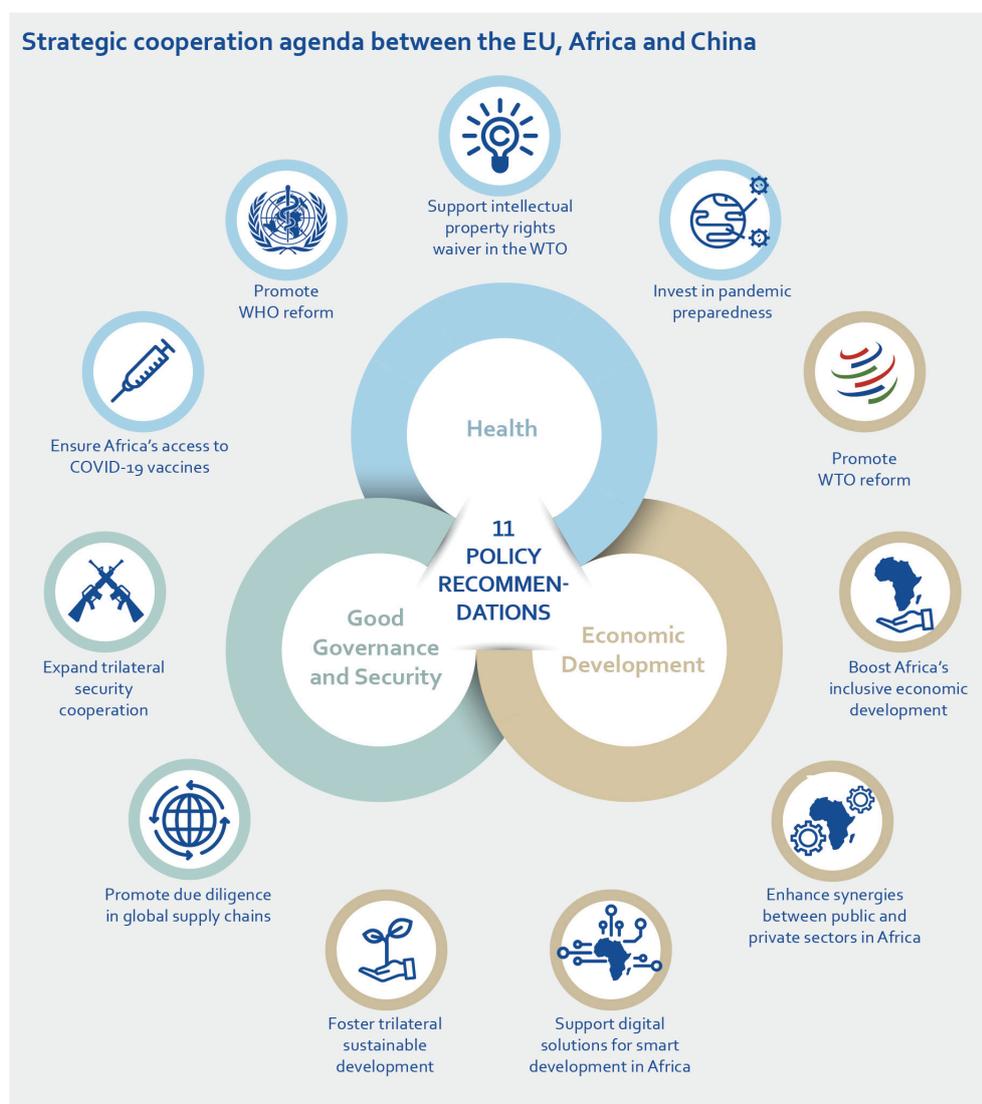
¹⁷⁵ Official Journal of the EU, *Regulation 2017/821 laying down supply chain due diligence obligations for the Union importers of tin, tantalum and tungsten, their ores, and gold originating from conflict-affected and high-risk areas*, 17 May 2017.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ The German Business Representation (BDI), *Towards a European Supply Chain Law*, 18 December 2020.

As emphasised by the newly imposed EU sanctions on China, Beijing has a poor human rights track record.¹⁷⁸ Still, experts have stressed that contrary to its poor reputation, the Chinese government is closely monitoring the legal development of human rights standards for companies in other countries and at international level.¹⁷⁹ Within the UN, China also contributed to the process of drawing up a UN Treaty on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights, which was initiated by South Africa in 2014.¹⁸⁰

3 Policy Recommendations



¹⁷⁸ Council of the EU, *Press release*, 22 March 2021.

¹⁷⁹ PowerShift e.V., *Supply chain due diligence: China's role in the international debate and setting of standards*, Berlin, December 2019.

¹⁸⁰ UN Human Rights Council, *Resolution 26/9, Elaboration of an international legally binding instrument on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights*, 26th regular session, 26 June 2014

As highlighted by the previous section, **trilateral cooperation between the EU, Africa and China** can offer an **original solution to challenges posed by GPG provision**. Given its unique features and its experience in European public goods,¹⁸¹ the EU has the potential to play a leading role in this process. Based on the three policy fields examined above, this section offers **11 concrete policy proposals for the EU's strategic cooperation agenda with Africa and China**. These policy recommendations are clustered around the following **three key issue areas: 1) health 2) economic development 3) good governance and security**. In order of importance, health should be the key priority, followed by more medium-term smart and sustainable, economic development. Finally, good governance and peace have been identified as an emerging area with more long-term prospects for trilateral collaboration.

3.1 Health

Action on global public goods for health is the **most pressing priority**. Cooperation between the EU, Africa and China could be most usefully applied to four health aspects.

- **Ensure Africa's access to COVID-19 vaccines**

The EU and China should refrain from vaccine nationalism and ensure that Africa has access to COVID-19 vaccines. Given their commitment to make COVID-19 vaccines global public goods, the EU and China **foster joint international responses and ensure that geopolitical competition does not disrupt Africa's vaccine rollout**.

- **Promote WHO reform**

The WHO needs to play a vital role in the international pandemic response and global health in general. The EU should support the work of this vital institution and collaborate with China and Africa to **promote an ambitious reform agenda**.

- **Support intellectual property rights waiver in the WTO**

Intellectual property rights can threaten provision of the health GPG by undermining access to affordable medicines for developing countries. The EU and China should **support the proposal to temporarily waive certain rules of Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)** to enable African countries' access to vaccines, medicines and medical technologies vital in preventing, suppressing or treating COVID-19.

- **Invest in pandemic preparedness**

The EU has much to learn about tackling COVID-19 from China and Africa. As other infectious diseases will surely emerge, it should cooperate with them to invest and strengthen pandemic preparedness. Trilateral cooperation should in particular focus on **developing reliable early-warning systems** that could help prevent the outbreak of new pandemics and mitigate their impact on a local, regional and/or global scale. The EU's Global Health Summit to strengthen pandemic preparedness, scheduled for May 2021, would be a good starting point.

¹⁸¹ M. Thöne and H. Kreuter, *European Public Goods: Their Contribution to a Strong Europe*, Bertelsmann Stiftung, September 2020.

3.2 Economic Development

After addressing the current health emergency, **medium- and long-term** responses to address the global economic recovery are key. By fostering trilateral cooperation with Africa and China, the EU could contribute to the provision of global public goods for economic development. In line with its own Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the EU should focus on five policy actions.

- **Promote WTO reform**

Trade responses by the WTO can prepare the ground for a strong recovery of the global economy. As an important WTO member, the EU should work together with Africa and China to promote that body's reform. In particular, the EU should reach out to China to **help the AU obtain observer status in relevant WTO bodies**.

- **Boost Africa's economic recovery and inclusive economic growth**

The global economic recovery is likely to be uneven. The EU needs to make sure that Africa is not left behind and global inequality does not worsen. As a short-term response, the EU and China should explore **options for more transparent and better coordinated approaches to debt relief for Africa**. In addition, the EU and China need to help boost Africa's long-term inclusive growth. To do so, they should **support Africa in formulating an inclusive economic development agenda** that would generate more quality jobs for its large labour force (in particular youth and women) and promote Africa's post COVID-19 industrialisation.

- **Enhance synergies between public and private sectors in Africa**

With a view to inclusive economic recovery in Africa, synergies between public and private sector actors should be fostered. As highlighted by the "Finance in Common" Summit, development banks can play an important role here. The EU should strengthen the EIB's role in Africa and foster **trilateral coordination between the EIB, the AIIB and the AfDB** to support investments in Africa's long-term economic recovery.

- **Support digital solutions for smart development in Africa**

Digitalisation can accelerate the post-COVID-19 economic recovery. The EU should collaborate with China to **mitigate the digital divide between Africa and the rest of the world**, as well as support digital solutions to ongoing development challenges. Moreover, it should **help Africa draw up its own smart development plan**, based on a different set of values than China's authoritarian digital approach.

- **Foster sustainable development and green growth**

The pandemic represents an opportunity to build a more resource-efficient and climate-friendly global economy. To foster green growth in a post-COVID-19 world, the EU should establish a **trilateral dialogue on sustainable development**, building on existing trilateral initiatives like the Sino-German Center for Sustainable Development.

3.3 Good governance and Security

The provision of security as a global public good represents a **long-term** challenge. The pandemic has not only contributed to a shift in thinking on security, but also raised awareness of the importance of good governance.

- **Promote due diligence in global supply chains**

Recent debates have highlighted the need to foster values-based supply chains. To support this process the EU should back South Africa's initiative of a **UN Treaty on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights**. In addition, the EU should establish a **trilateral dialogue on human rights supply chain due diligence** with China and Africa

- **Expand trilateral security cooperation**

The **trilateral dialogue on combating the diversion of arms and ammunition in Africa**¹⁸² is one of the few examples of practical trilateral security cooperation between the EU, Africa and China. It has delivered tangible results and offers a promising path for future trilateral cooperation. It should therefore be **continued**.

Based on this initial trilateral security initiative, the EU, Africa and China should expand their security collaboration. There are **opportunities for trilateral cooperation** on building peace and security in the framework of the **Belt and Road Initiative**. Africa, in particular Eastern Africa, is relevant to the Maritime Silk Road. For this reason, there are joint interests on which to build common approaches in ensuring that external interventions by China and the EU promote, rather than undermine, peace in Africa.

Against this background, the EU should focus on trilateral cooperation in the area of **maritime security** and the protection of international sea lanes. Despite the EU's growing threat perception vis-à-vis China's maritime engagement in the South China Sea, it is in both their interests that the law of the sea is observed, including in Africa. The upcoming EU Indo-Pacific strategy, which will also cover East Africa, will further outline the EU's ambition to keep the regional order open and rules-based. This will require cooperation with both China and Africa.

Conclusion

COVID-19 has pushed policymakers in the EU, Africa and China to address global challenges and highlighted the importance of global public goods. It has also raised questions about existing models of international cooperation and called for innovative solutions. To avoid remaining a passive spectator, the EU should show international leadership and actively contribute to shaping the transition towards a post-COVID-19 world order. In the current context of U.S.-China rivalry, the EU is well positioned to propose a third way. Drawing up an EU strategic cooperation agenda with Africa and China could represent an important step in this direction. By initiating such trilateral cooperation, the EU could promote an alternative win-win-win model to a zero-sum world characterised by traditional big power politics.

¹⁸² *Trilateral dialogue project on preventing the diversion of arms and ammunition in Africa.*

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