

Tuesday, 22 April 2008 - Strasbourg

China's policy and its effects on Africa (debate)

Ana Maria Gomes, rapporteur . – (PT) Mr President, China's unrestrained quest for oil, natural resources and new markets in Africa raises concerns about the impact of China's growing presence in that continent and the respective ramifications for European policies. Europe cannot start pointing the finger at China out of fear, nor can it afford to take part in an unprincipled competition avoiding methods and criteria that are in Beijing's own interest. Both Europe and China have an obligation to contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals: poverty reduction and conflict resolution in Africa. Both have to recognise that only through promoting sustainable development and good governance can their own interests and investments be sustainable and seen as legitimate in Africa.

In this report we have tried to analyse China's presence in Africa in an objective way, acknowledging both the positive and negative impacts. Based on various specific recommendations for action, there are two key political messages: firstly, the EU needs to give a coordinated response to the challenges raised by China's supposedly 'no strings' policy. This response cannot abandon European principles. The EU must stick to its development cooperation policy, especially as regards human rights conditionality. This is because there can be no good governance without respect for human rights and without good governance, and the rule of law it implies, there will be no sustainable development in Africa or any other part of the world. Secondly, Europe must involve China in discussions on their respective African policies, but such cooperation obviously cannot occur over the heads of the Africans. This trilateral involvement requires adequate support for the role to be played by the African institutions, such as the African Union, NEPAD, other regional institutions and governments and national parliaments. For this reason, Europe must increase its support for strengthening African civil society to encourage accountability from the respective governments.

In this report, we recommend that the EU should not pass up opportunities to talk candidly with China, or about China in Africa, specifically when this means voicing criticism in private or in public. China wants to be seen as a responsible player in Africa, yet it frequently invokes the rhetoric of non-interference to try to justify unacceptable actions, such as its continued complacency towards the Sudanese Government blocking the sending of a UN-African Union hybrid force - which should have been in Darfur long ago - or its more recent and disgusting sending of arms to the Mugabe regime on board a vessel that is - quite rightly - being prevented from unloading by Zimbabwe's neighbouring countries. In reality, everything China does in Africa has a political impact, be it positive or negative.

Furthermore, China is showing it is a pragmatic power that learns fast. It is therefore vital that Europe does not stop trying to get across to Beijing that what is expected of a permanent member of the UN Security Council, such as China, is in fact a contribution towards promoting UN principles and objectives.

In this report, we propose that the EU should encourage China to step up its participation in multilateral donor meetings and adopt specific internationally accepted criteria and guidelines on transparency of aid, the extractive industries, good governance, environmental protection, labour rights, etc., with a view to ensuring that it really contributes to poverty reduction, the Millennium Development Goals and promoting peace and security in Africa.

Yet Europe also needs to take a look in the mirror and learn from its own mistakes and shortcomings as regards Africa. Member States need to deliver on official development assistance pledges and cutting aid and the goals to be achieved will only help emphasise China's merits in making quick funding available to Africa. Europe needs to improve the effectiveness of its aid and ensure there is consistency between its various policies and this implies no longer turning a blind eye to the crimes committed by certain oppressive African regimes with whom it continues to deal, as usual, at flagrant odds with its proclaimed criteria and principles.

To conclude, Mr President, I would like to thank the shadow rapporteurs and other colleagues for their excellent cooperation. Their amendments have contributed a great deal to enriching this report. I hope that such a broad consensus can continue tomorrow, all the more so as there are only a few amendments to vote on. I have put forward three amendments myself: two involve minor corrections and the third is to restate the European Parliament's position, calling for the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports to become legally binding. This would avoid the current paragraph 62 repeating the call contained in paragraph 66.