

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the ‘Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: The EU, Africa and China — Towards trilateral dialogue and cooperation’

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Rapporteur: **Mr JAHIER**

On 17 October 2008 the European Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

‘Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: The EU, Africa and China — Towards trilateral dialogue and cooperation’

The Section for External Relations, which was responsible for preparing the Committee’s work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 3 September 2009. The rapporteur was Mr JAHIER.

At its 456th plenary session, held on 30 September and 1 October 2009 (meeting of 1 October), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 145 votes to one with three abstentions.

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 Over the last 15 years, Africa has been the focus of growing attention from China, which has firmly established itself as the continent’s third trading and economic partner as a result of the constant increase in the volume of trade, investment and partnerships signed with the vast majority of African countries. While Europe remains Africa’s leading economic partner, its leading position is beginning to crumble in a multipolar world in which the emerging nations are seeking to establish a new order. Because Africa is a neighbouring region with shared interests, the involvement of other powers means that Europe must relaunch its partnership with the continent.

1.2 The EESC warmly welcomes the Commission’s proposal to launch trilateral dialogue and cooperation between the European Union, China and Africa. This prospect is as necessary and inevitable as its outcome is uncertain and problematic. It particularly appreciates the pragmatic and progressive approach, and the pertinence of the four specific sectors proposed: peace and security, infrastructure, exploitation of natural resources and the environment, and agriculture and food security.

1.3 Trilateral cooperation, however, can only be meaningful if it is both effective and based on parity. The asymmetry of present relations must be taken very seriously as the starting point: China is a single, very large country dealing with individual African countries, while Europe often struggles to speak with a single voice in its relations with the continent. Although

the Chinese presence in Africa is not free of some questionable areas, many African governments tend to prefer partnerships with Beijing, which seems more willing to meet their requests without imposing conditions or time-consuming red tape.

1.4 In order to have effective cooperation, first of all the genuine interest of all the stakeholders in the proposed strategy must be ascertained, as must their practical involvement in three-way dialogue. The Commission and the Council must therefore take any initiatives necessary to obtain appropriate responses to the proposals in this area.

There is also a need:

- for the European Union to make a greater commitment to ensuring that its own action, in the economic, diplomatic and development cooperation fields, is coherent, with a more assertive long-term geostrategic approach giving new vigour to the EU-Africa strategy adopted in Lisbon, and to increase funding;
- for governments and the African Union (AU) to pay greater attention to the long-term benefits that their countries could derive from a partnership with Europe and China, giving less prominence to the immediate advantages for local leaders. For this to happen, they need to be supported in building up their capacity to define and manage long-term Africa-wide and regional development strategies;

- to urge China to make a growing commitment to ensuring that the fruits of trilateral cooperation, as well as of the bilateral cooperation it conducts with individual African countries, benefit local societies and peoples as a whole, and not only their governments.

1.5 Making sustainable local growth the central objective means, more specifically, ensuring that:

- the creation of local added value is boosted;
- new social infrastructure is built up, taking account of existing structures;
- skills and technologies are effectively transferred;
- growth of local and regional markets, local businesses and, in general, improvements to living and working conditions are supported;
- partnerships between foreign businesses and local businesses are supported;
- unsustainable long-term debt is not worsened, and local and regional institutions in general are strengthened.

1.6 Parity-based dialogue and cooperation must also give each side the freedom to put even the most controversial items, or those attracting divergent views or concerns, on the agenda. Introducing key questions such as democratic governance, human rights and the role of civil society – currently missing from the communication – into the proposed process, in keeping with the contents of the EU Council decision, would be more consistent with both the 2007 Lisbon Strategy and the 2000 Cotonou Agreement governing relations between the EU and the ACP countries.

1.7 The EESC points in particular to the crucial importance of involving all non-state actors in trilateral dialogue, and especially the private sector, trade union organisations, farmers, and women's, consumers' and other organisations. The role of such actors has expanded significantly over the last few years, in part as a consequence of the success of the Lomé and Cotonou Agreements. This virtuous circle of participation by various socio-economic actors in EU-Africa relations should therefore not be penalised or put at risk, but rather put

to the best possible use. The EESC therefore calls on the Commission to include this key point in its proposal.

1.8 In the light of Europe's inevitably multilateral role and the United States' renewed interest in Africa, trilateral cooperation between the EU, China and Africa could also be extended to the United States, with a view to a more complete, efficient and parity-based partnership, of course working in the sectors indicated but reserving the right to extend cooperation to other spheres.

2. Introduction

2.1 Africa is changing rapidly. Although it still accounts for only 2 % of world GDP and less than 1 % of world industrial output, the continent is moving back into the current of globalisation after decades of geopolitical and economic marginalisation. The European Union remains the continent's main economic partner, but Africa is increasingly being courted by the 'emerging financiers' – first and foremost China, but also India, Japan, South Korea, the larger Latin American countries and the Gulf states. In recent years, the United States has also resumed its interest in Africa, principally in order to guarantee secure energy supplies and combat the threat of terrorism. Although 40 % of its population still lives well below the poverty line, Africa is seen less as the 'hopeless continent' and increasingly as a 'new frontier' offering development and business opportunities.

2.2 Africa has seen much political innovation over the last decade: the creation of the African Union, accompanied by the launch of its 2004-2009 strategic plan and the deployment of new intervention capabilities for conflict resolution; the strengthening of regional economic communities; and programmes for economic development (the New Partnership for Africa's Development, NEPAD) and governance (African Peer Review Mechanism).

2.3 As a result of this raft of changes, the renewed international attention being paid to Africa has, as repeatedly pointed out by Commissioner Louis Michel (¹), focused on three main areas: economic interests, security interests, and the new power-based and geostrategic interests.

2.4 In economic terms, in addition to competition for access to and control of the continent's natural resources, starting with energy, attention has turned to the still enormous potential of the domestic African market, which has been growing at an average rate of 6 % in recent years, accompanied by low inflation and a virtuous circle of substantial reductions in public debt.

(¹) See, in particular, Louis MICHEL, *Afrique-Europe: l'indispensable alliance*, monograph, EC, December 2007.

2.5 In both these areas, China has displayed great determination and a capacity for long-term, structural investment ⁽¹⁾, reshaping the historical links with African countries that it initiated in the 1950s. From the mid-1990s onwards, while continuing to emphasise South-South cooperation between developing nations, China has focused greater attention on the economic opportunities Africa has to offer, and has established friendly relations with almost all African countries. The continent-wide dimension of the new Chinese approach was confirmed with the creation, by Beijing, of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) ⁽²⁾. Its summits, held every three years (Beijing 2000, Addis Ababa 2003 and Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, scheduled for December 2009), have set the pace for continued development of relations between China and the African countries. The renewed Chinese strategy towards the continent was officially unveiled in the White Paper on China's African Policy ⁽³⁾, published in January 2006.

2.6 The significantly altered context compared with previous decades has also prompted the European Union to review its own policy towards Africa. This process culminated in the adoption, in December 2007 in Lisbon, of a new joint EU-Africa strategy on which the EESC has already issued a detailed opinion ⁽⁴⁾.

2.7 While China and Europe rekindle their interest and willingness to invest in Africa, the way these major players will in the future define their reciprocal lines of action is raising questions and expectations on account of both the obvious prospect of competition and the possible areas of cooperation. It must be remembered that while in absolute terms, the EU and China are respectively Africa's first- and third-ranking trade partners and foreign investors, the relative weight of Europe-Africa trade relations has fallen over the last ten years, while that of China-Africa relations has risen dramatically ⁽⁵⁾.

2.8 Taking on the growing public debate regarding China's influence in Africa, and in response to the adoption in April

2008 of a resolution on this subject by the European Parliament ⁽⁶⁾, over the last two years the Commission has conducted an in-depth discussion, accompanied by significant and wide-ranging consultations ⁽⁷⁾, to gain an understanding of the repercussions of the processes currently under way and to identify the possible outlines of a trilateral debate between the EU, China and Africa.

3. Gist of the Communication

3.1 The Communication proposes to seek the most effective ways to facilitate a process of dialogue and joint cooperation between the Africa, China and the EU. The Commission's main objective is to promote mutual understanding and to enable joint, coordinated action to be undertaken in strategic sectors, in accordance with priorities defined primarily by African institutions.

3.2 The Communication is based on a pragmatic and progressive approach, focusing principally on the outlook for practical coordination in sectors considered to be crucial in promoting stability and development across Africa. These sectors are:

- **Peace and security in Africa**, with a view above all to closer cooperation with the African Union and China within the UN framework, in order to support the development of the African Peace and Security Architecture and boost the AU's capacity to manage peace-keeping operations.
- **Support for African infrastructure**, which is the backbone of development, investment and trade, and for enhancing interconnectivity and regional integration, especially in the transport, telecommunications and energy sectors.
- **Sustainable management of the environment and natural resources**, which, by intensifying links with initiatives such as EITI (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative), FLEGT (Forestry Law Enforcement, Government and Trade) and the Kimberley Process for transparency in the diamond industry, allows more transparent processes, more technology transfer and investment to tackle climate change and encourage the development of renewable energies.

⁽¹⁾ Not only natural resources, infrastructure and trade are concerned. China's leading bank, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, has acquired a 20 % stake in South Africa's leading bank – also the biggest in Africa as a whole – the Standard Bank, spending 5 600 million US dollars. This is the biggest investment ever made in Africa by a foreign group.

⁽²⁾ See the official FOCAC website, www.focac.org/eng/

⁽³⁾ China's African Policy, 12 January 2006, <http://www.focac.org/eng/zgdfzcc/t463748.htm>

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 77, 31.3.2009, p. 148–156, *EU-Africa Strategy*, rapporteur: Mr DANTIN.

⁽⁵⁾ According to IMF data, the volume of EU-Africa trade, which in 1995 accounted for 45 % of all African trade, has fallen to little more than 30 %, while China's has risen from only a few percentage points in 1995 to nearly 27 % today. In 2008, China-Africa trade reached USD 106.8 billion. This represented an increase of 45 % over the previous year and meant that the target of 100 billion by 2010, announced at the November 2006 FOCAC summit in Beijing, had been topped two years early. See also *Commission staff working paper, Annexes to the Communication of the Commission*, SEC(2008) 2641 final.

⁽⁶⁾ *China's policy and its effect on Africa*, European Parliament document A6-0080/2008/P6_TA-PROV(2008)0173, EP resolution of 23 April 2008, rapporteur Ana Maria GOMES.

⁽⁷⁾ Prominent among them, the conference held by the European Commission on 28 June 2007, bringing together more than 180 African, Chinese and European policymakers, experts and diplomats (*Partners in competition? The EU, Africa and China*).

— **Agriculture and food security**, with the aim of boosting productivity and production levels in African agriculture, in particular by means of agricultural research and innovation, control of animal diseases and food safety, under the CAADP (Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme).

3.3 The Commission wishes to see dialogue and consultation expanding at all levels (national, regional, continent-wide and in bilateral EU-China relations), in order to support decision-makers in enhancing mutual understanding on respective policies and approaches, and developing practical cooperation opportunities. The process will also help to promote the effectiveness of development aid, in keeping with the March 2005 Paris Declaration, and the conclusions of the September 2008 Accra seminar.

3.4 The Council of the European Union has taken on board and approved the main recommendations set out in the Communication, considering that a trilateral dialogue of this kind could help to 'support the efforts undertaken by Africa and by the international community to promote democratisation, political and economic integration, good governance and respect for human rights' ⁽¹⁾ and recommended a more in-depth examination of the proposed practical measures.

3.5 The EESC however notes with concern and disappointment that neither China nor the AU has yet taken any official position regarding the trilateral dialogue proposed by the EU. Cooperation with Africa was not on the agenda at the most recent EU-China summit, in spite of the proposal to this effect in the Communication under discussion ⁽²⁾. At present, therefore, there is no tangible evidence of willingness on the part of China or the AU to accept the EU's proposal.

4. Positive aspects

4.1 The Communication contains a number of positive elements that are to be welcomed, including:

- an approach based on dialogue and exchange as part of the necessary policy of seeking coordination between donors and the main stakeholders;
- the pragmatism displayed in the choice of the four sectors which are certainly of strategic importance and offer plentiful scope for action;

⁽¹⁾ See the Conclusions of the 2902nd meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council of 10 November 2008.

⁽²⁾ 11th EU-China summit, Prague, 20 May 2009, Joint Press Communiqué.

- the proposed progressive approach to building up trilateral cooperation, seeking to make maximum use of all existing structures rather than setting up yet another costly multi-lateral structure.

4.2 With regard to the second point in particular, the four sectors identified are unquestionably crucial to African development and, albeit in different ways, to the systems of bilateral China-Africa and Europe-Africa relations.

4.3 The renewed outbreak of certain conflicts and the fragile nature of the peace processes under way, combined with the risk of new forms of fundamentalism and/or of areas that might shelter terrorist bases, mean that cooperation in maintaining and promoting peace and security is of vital importance. Particular attention should be paid to support for the African Peace and Security Architecture, and AU peace-keeping missions, in the form of capacity-building, training and logistical and/or financial support.

4.4 Cooperation in maintaining and promoting peace and security should however also include a dialogue specifically on the rules governing arms supply and trading, especially to governments or non-state armed groups caught up in current conflicts and/or who are responsible for serious human rights violations ⁽³⁾, thereby bringing an issue on which debate has already commenced at the UN into the trilateral China-Europe-Africa relationship.

4.5 The renewed emphasis on infrastructure investment, which has been long overlooked by European cooperation but nevertheless constitutes the core of the Chinese approach to Africa, is strategically important for two sets of reasons. First of all, proper infrastructure is necessary in order to ensure both access to and transport of raw materials or products put on the African markets, and those types of practical and effective regional integration that are key to Africa's social and economic development. Improving infrastructure, or creating new infrastructure from scratch, is furthermore a clear priority for many African governments, and cannot remain subject to local capacity for funding and financial sustainability alone ⁽⁴⁾.

4.6 The importance of environmental sustainability and natural resources management is self-evident, not only with regard to the international context of climate change, but also to all those aspects relating to the conditions governing the exploitation, transport and use of the continent's natural resources, especially mining activities and energy.

⁽³⁾ See the above-mentioned EP report and resolution, 2008, A6-0080/2008/P6_TA-PROV(2008)0173, EP resolution of 23 April 2008, rapporteur Ana Maria GOMES.

⁽⁴⁾ See, in this regard, the discussions and decisions of the 12th AU Summit, held from 26 January to 3 February 2009 in Addis Ababa, the main theme of which was 'Infrastructure Development in Africa' www.africa-union.org

4.7 Debate in recent years has focused primarily on environmental and labour conditions on sites run by or linked to Chinese companies operating in Africa, as amply documented by a study carried out by the African Labour Research Network ⁽¹⁾. However, it should be borne in mind that the same debate should be held about many European or transnational companies. The problem of compliance with international standards, together with transparency ⁽²⁾ in concluding and implementing contracts signed with African governments concerns China, Europe and Africa in equal measure, and should consequently form an essential part of the trilateral dialogue on the sustainable management of natural resources and the environment, and of that on support for African infrastructure.

4.8 The recognition of the central role of farming and food security has at last regained its place among the priorities of the main donors and in the joint strategy for Africa. This attention must however be urgently translated into practical steps, sustained over the long term, regarding rural development as a whole, and ensuring that rural populations participate actively, that small farmers' organisations are involved, and that their access to, and long-term management of, local resources are safeguarded.

4.9 From this point of view, it is worth bearing in mind the alert recently issued by the summit of farmers' organisations of the five regions of Africa, held in Rome by Coldiretti, concerning the upsurge in purchases of farmland in Africa and other developing countries, made by countries such as South Korea, China, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Japan with a view to ensuring their own food supplies and resources for biofuels production ⁽³⁾.

4.10 Cooperation on food security could also be used to launch a dialogue on other important issues, such as meeting the Millennium Development Goals, protecting the most vulnerable groups, and health protection. In this latter field, particular attention should be given to devising common strategies to combat the three major pandemics ⁽⁴⁾ – malaria,

HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis – which are already the target of international cooperation on a multilateral basis.

4.11 Turning to the role of African institutions in the triangular dialogue process, the central place of the African Union, alongside the regional economic organisations and the individual countries, is warmly welcomed. Opening the annual EU-China dialogue to participation by the AU troika is also important, as is the idea of giving the AU Commission in Addis Ababa a facilitating role in the regular triangular consultations. These indications fit in perfectly with the need, highlighted by the EESC in its earlier opinion on the EU-Africa strategy ⁽⁵⁾, to ensure that African institutions assume concrete responsibility in order to strengthen their sovereignty and legitimacy, and to allow genuinely balanced partnerships. However, it needs to be ensured that these priorities are shared and adopted by the AU and are rapidly converted into concrete action plans.

4.12 The pursuit of a trilateral dialogue between the EU, China and Africa is all the more important in view of the attraction that Beijing exerts over the continent. China appears to many African governments as an example to follow, as it has succeeded in escaping from poverty, defeating disease and becoming a leading player on the world stage within the space of a single generation. China's struggle against poverty has unfolded primarily in the countryside, putting the emphasis on development and boosting farm productivity – a strategy that could also serve the interests of African countries ⁽⁶⁾. China's attractiveness is however also enhanced by the fact that China carries no colonial baggage, still defines itself as a developing country and rejects the principle of the donor-beneficiary relationship, which has historically been more a feature of the OECD approach. These characteristics, combined with major availability of funds to invest or lend to partner African governments, give Beijing an obvious edge in its relations with Africa.

5. Negative aspects

5.1 There are also, however, negative aspects to Chinese-African relations, which are of concern to external observers, and which will need to be discussed within the process of trilateral cooperation proposed by the Commission.

⁽¹⁾ A. Yaw Baah - H. Jauch, Chinese Investments in Africa: A Labour Perspective, ALRN, May 2009, http://www.fnv.nl/binary/report2009_chinese_investments_in_africa_tcm7-23663.pdf

⁽²⁾ See Tax Justice Network, *Breaking the curse: How transparent taxation and fair taxes can turn Africa's mineral wealth into development*, available at: http://www.taxjustice.net/cms/upload/pdf/TJN4Africa_0903_breaking_the_curse_final_text.pdf

⁽³⁾ These organisations referred to purchases, in 2008 alone, of some 7.6 million hectares of land, and to farm agreements signed between China and several African countries: http://www.coldiretti.it/docindex/cncd/informazioni/314_09.htm See also L. Cotula, S. Vermeulen, R. Leonard, J. Keeley, *Land grab or development opportunity? Agricultural investment and international land deals in Africa*, FAO-IFAD-IIED, May 2009.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 195, 18.8.2006, p. 104–109, Prioritising Africa: European civil society's perspective, rapporteur: Mr BEDOSSA.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 77, 31.3.2009, p. 148–156, op.cit.

⁽⁶⁾ With only 7 % of its arable land surface, China feeds 22 % of the world's population, has basically triumphed in the battle against extreme poverty, illiteracy and the most destructive diseases and epidemics, and has brought down infant mortality. According to Martin Ravallion, *Are there lessons for Africa from China's success against poverty?*, The World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper 4463, January 2008, Africa could draw important lessons from a careful analysis of the key elements in Chinese development. See appendix 2. See also R. SANDREY, H. EDINGER, *The relevance of Chinese agricultural technologies for African smallholder farmers: agricultural technology research in China*, Centre for Chinese Studies, Stellenbosch University, April 2009, <http://www.ccs.org.za/downloads/CCS%20China%20Agricultural%20Technology%20Research%20Report%20April%202009.pdf>

5.2 The growing Chinese presence in Africa is not free of some questionable areas, starting with a return to centre-stage for local governments and urban elites, with the ensuing and alarming marginalisation of the African private sector, the endangering of the modest social advances secured by African trade unions, and working conditions that heavily penalise local workers. In a real partnership of equals, any of the three partners – the EU, China and Africa – must be able to put even the most controversial items, or those attracting divergent views or concerns, on the agenda.

5.3 A comparison of the four sectors for cooperation proposed by the Commission with the eight points given priority status in the EU-Africa Strategy action plan unveiled in Lisbon ⁽¹⁾ reveals the absence from the Communication of major issues such as democratic governance and human rights, or decent work. For the EU, it would be more consistent with both the Lisbon Strategy and the 2000 Cotonou Agreement ⁽²⁾, governing relations between the EU and the ACP, to introduce these questions, together with the role of civil society, into the trilateral dialogue.

5.4 The EU's strategy for Africa is different from China's. While the EU provides most of its aid in the form of donations, subject to increasingly strict political conditions (respect for democratic rules, human rights, ILO conventions, combating corruption and promoting good governance, and involving civil society), with the aim of reducing poverty, China generally grants loans under advantageous conditions, largely geared to building infrastructure and guaranteed by long-term contracts to exploit natural resources. Moreover, Chinese loans are often linked to the employment of Chinese firms, goods and sometimes even workforce, in the form of 'tied aid', which has now largely been dropped from the programmes of the OECD countries. Finally, the rules of the OECD area on tendering are, in many cases, themselves favourable to companies from emerging countries, with China in pole position.

5.5 The Chinese approach is generally more to the liking of the African ruling classes, as it is condition-free and is not slowed down by European-style red tape. However, it entails a twofold risk: of generating a type of massive re-indebtedness, the long-term effects of which could be unsustainable, and of reinforcing the dependence of individual countries' economies on the production and export of single crops, dependent in turn on price fluctuations on the international markets.

5.6 For its part, Europe – while remaining Africa's largest economic and trade partner – struggles to speak with a single

voice and to establish and maintain the overall consistency of its own policies, whether they concern development, trade, external relations or security. On the ground, too, coordination of the actions of the different Member States remains limited, which reduces their impact and effectiveness.

6. Some further points

6.1 Together with the conditions that the EU inserts into its links with Africa, a number of African governments have pointed to other differences of approach between Europe and China:

- a range of problems that have emerged in relations between the EU and African countries during the negotiations to conclude Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), in contrast to the progressive and highly publicised opening-up of the Chinese market to African goods, free of customs duty (the number of such products is scheduled to rise from 190 in 2006 to 440 in 2010);
- the strong, high-profile involvement in building infrastructure, schools, hospitals and public buildings by the Chinese government, in contrast with earlier European projects which were often left incomplete;
- a considerably more concrete response by China in the area of training and capacity-building for professionals in the agricultural, medical, scientific and cultural fields, accompanied by numerous opportunities for African students to enter Chinese universities and training centres;
- the wide availability of manufactured goods of Chinese origin – sometimes less than fully compliant with international product safety standards, with grave consequences for public health and the environment – which are gradually invading markets and homes across the continent, often with a damaging impact on specific local production sectors, starting with textiles ⁽³⁾.

6.2 The current international economic and financial crisis points to the need for a debate on the possible effects on Africa ⁽⁴⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Peace and security; democratic governance and human rights; trade and regional integration and infrastructure; partnership for the Millennium Development Goals; energy; climate change; migration, mobility and employment; science, the information society and space.

⁽²⁾ See Article 9(1).

⁽³⁾ On this point, see the interesting World Bank report from 2007, *Africa's Silk Road*.

⁽⁴⁾ On this subject, see the Communication *Supporting developing countries in coping with the crisis*, COM(2009) 160 final and the EESC opinion currently being drawn up.

The effects of the worldwide recession, shrinking exports, the protectionist closure of many markets and the falling prices of many raw materials are creating a worrying situation, that threatens to seriously jeopardise the achievements of the last ten years, such as the reduction of the debt and public deficits, increased infrastructure investment and competition to provide it, or the overhauling of tax systems, together with the efforts to diversify national production.

6.3 In the face of the crisis, China has recently confirmed and even increased its commitments in the area of aid and loans as well as that of investment ⁽¹⁾. The EU is striving to honour its commitments, but some Member States have already drastically reduced bilateral financial resources and commitments in 2009, with similar if not worse plans for 2010. As has been said at every recent summit, what is instead needed are new resources.

6.4 A series of migratory phenomena are increasingly coming to the fore in relations between Europe and Africa, and between China and Africa. They have so far been little studied, especially regarding the arrival in African countries of Chinese citizens. Opening up discussion on the forms and scale of these movements and any connections between them could be of help in understanding their possible impact on African development.

6.5 Lastly, the EESC considers as crucial the complex question of civil society involvement, an issue that is not only vital for the European side ⁽²⁾, but is now an integral and significant part of all partnership links with Africa, especially following the Cotonou Agreement. This aspect does not currently appear to weigh heavily in relations between China and Africa, or in bilateral relations between Beijing and the individual countries.

The four sectors identified by the Commission are suitable for wide-reaching and structured involvement of all non-state actors, in particular employers, trade unions and farmers', women's and consumers' organisation. Their role in African societies, as well as in economic dynamics and political relations, has been recognised and has grown as a direct result of the success of the process launched by the Lomé and Cotonou Agreements, but it is at risk of being downgraded and pushed to the margins if the bi- and trilateral dialogues are kept at intergovernmental level only – although this role should be seen as a decisive asset to be put to best use and re-dynamised.

6.6 The EESC notes with concern that the Communication makes no mention of the issue, nor of the real prospect of involving either the social partners or, more broadly, non-state actors in the proposed process.

Brussels, 1 October 2009.

*The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee*
Mario SEPI

⁽¹⁾ See the commitments made during Hu Jintao's visit to four African countries (Mali, Senegal, Tanzania and Mauritius) in mid-February 2009.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 77, 31.3.2009, p. 148–156, *EU-China relations: role of civil society*, rapporteur: Mr Sharma.