

CHINA-AFRICA COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF THINK TANKS

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DIRECTOR GENERAL

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Honorable Deputy Foreign Minister, Distinguished Ambassadors, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to take part in the opening session of the 7th Sino-African think tanks Forum. This meeting will, undoubtedly, contribute to the deepening of reflection about China's relationships with African countries.

Relations between China and Morocco are centuries old. From 1342 to 1344, Ibn Battouta, a Moroccan traveler, was the first to introduce China to the Western and Arab worlds.

Nowadays, the cooperation between the two countries is rich, diversified and fruitful. Since diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1958, Moroccan-Chinese friendship has continued to strengthen, fostered by mutual understanding, common commitments and the desire for a win-win partnership extending to all areas:

- On the political level, cooperation between Morocco and China is marked by a convergence of points of view at both bilateral and multilateral levels.
- On global issues, the two countries have in common their commitment to the crucial challenges facing humanity such as peace keeping, security, migration and climate change.

- Morocco has attracted major Chinese companies (BAW, BYD, Haite Group, ZTE...) thanks to its political stability and its economic attractiveness. These firms accompany the transformation of the Moroccan economy towards growth sectors where China has accumulated significant experience, in particular the automotive, aeronautics and digitalization sectors. Through the sustained setting up of Chinese companies in Morocco in the future, China's part in the FDI would be equivalent to its part in foreign trade with the Kingdom.
- China is Morocco's third largest trading partner with an overall trade volume of 39.5 billion Dirham in 2016, or approximately 4 billion dollars with an annual average growth of +18.2% between 2001 and 2016. The result of this rapid evolution of exchanges is a heavy trade deficit for Morocco that should be reduced strongly through the development of goods export to China and, also, the expansion of services, especially tourism.
- Tourism also has great potential for cooperation. The removal in 2016, of entry visas for Chinese citizens has boosted trade and doubled the number of Chinese tourists visiting Morocco between 2016 and 2017.
- Morocco is the first Arab country to host three Confucius institutes, one in Rabat (2009), the second in Casablanca (2012) and the third in Tétouan (2017).

Consecrating this rapprochement, Morocco and China concluded, during His Majesty the King's visit in 2016, a strategic partnership aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation in sectors with high job creation potential and, in particular, the economic, financial, industrial, cultural, tourism, energy and infrastructure sectors.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

A new milestone in bilateral relations between the Kingdom and China and in triangular relations between China-Morocco-Africa and China-Morocco-Europe was Morocco's endorsement at the end of 2017 to the Memorandum of Understanding on the New Silk Roads. Indeed, the Kingdom of Morocco has shown its willingness to actively participate in the fulfillment of this planetary project which is consistent with the "win-win" approach advocated by His Majesty King Mohammed VI, the only approach able to contribute to the development of the African continent.

With its diversifying open economy relying on modern infrastructure (Tanger Med Port, airports, high-speed train...) and thanks to the wealth and quality of its partnerships with Europe and the United States, Morocco, as a regional hub can play an active role in the deployment of the New Silk Roads. Furthermore, thanks to their recognized experience in African markets, Moroccan companies may be partners of choice for Chinese companies wishing to expand on the African continent. In addition, the reputation of the Kingdom of Morocco, its cultural and spiritual influence and its age-old ties with the peoples of Africa are undeniable assets and offer important prospects for this great project.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Morocco has constantly expressed its willingness to consolidate and diversify its partnerships with Asian States, notwithstanding linguistic and cultural barriers. In its foreign policy and in the conduct of its internal affairs, the Kingdom of Morocco has made respect for cultural diversity a cardinal value recognized by the Constitution.

Moroccan foreign policy is based on political and religious moderation, diligent participation in peacekeeping operations and humanitarian actions, sensitivity to global issues and extensive trade openness. Implementing such a policy requires a high-level strategic thinking capacity, a mission to which the Royal Institute of Strategic Studies contributes. Thereupon, I would like, before this prestigious assembly, to briefly introduce the Royal Institute for Strategic Studies, created by His Majesty The King Mohammed VI in 2007 to contribute to enlightening Morocco's strategic choices on political, economic, social, cultural and environmental issues.

Both a strategic think tank, a debate forum and an intellectual diplomacy player, the Royal Institute of Strategic Studies was created to strengthen the capacity of the Kingdom of Morocco to adapt, analyze and anticipate the profound changes taking place at the national and international levels.

Strategic thinking relates to national, international and global issues. Morocco's foreign relations work occupies a prominent place in the activities of the Royal Institute of Strategic Studies.

As part of its permanent strategic watch mission, an international panel of recognized futurists (IPF) has been set up, in which different continents are represented, in order to anticipate crucial issues for the future of humanity and to contribute to the development of a vision of the world that is not limited to the long-standing Western vision. This new vision acknowledges the specific characteristics of the world's major regions, particularly those that constitute projection spaces for the Kingdom's foreign policy.

The Royal Institute of Strategic Studies is also a place of peaceful debate and collective intelligence where visions of Morocco in the making are born and exchanged. In order to benefit from cross-fertilization, the institute brings together multidisciplinary panels of public and private decision-makers, diplomats, academics and civil society actors on an almost weekly basis. This activity is valuable in many respects. It is about enriching strategic thinking, promoting Morocco, but also building bridges with the Kingdom's various partners.



With respect to the relationship between Morocco and China, the Institute has carried out several studies, notably on Morocco's strategic alliances and the potential of its relations with BRICS, as well as on the Asia-Pacific dynamic and its impact on global balances and on Morocco.

As part of intellectual diplomacy, the Royal Institute of Strategic Studies, through its representatives, has conducted visits and took part in profitable exchanges with prestigious Chinese think tanks such as the China Center for Contemporary World Studies, the China Institute of International Studies, the Shanghai Institute for International Studies and the Shanghai Social Science Association, as well as to renowned academic institutes such as the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and the School of Political Science and International Relations at Tongji University.

The Royal Institute of Strategic Studies has also received high-level Chinese delegations. Successive Chinese Ambassadors to Morocco have given lectures as part of the Ambassadors' debate cycle. Finally, two books on China and its future were recently presented and discussed at the Institute.

Interest in relations with China is motivated by the fact that it is Africa's leading trading partner, a continent that constitutes Morocco's strategic depth. In line with Morocco's commitment to Africa's development and its desire to convey its voice on the international scene, the Institute has undertaken the following actions.

- It has conducted numerous studies to enhance understanding of Africa and to shed new light on the continent, showing that Africa is on the move. Alongside the 2018 strategic report, devoted to the autonomous development of the African continent, the Institute published an atlas map of Africa and carried out studies on Morocco's return to the African Union and the prospect of its accession to ECOWAS, as well as on the Kingdom of Morocco's relations with the various regions of the continent.
- The Institute has analyzed issues and challenges related to urban sprawl, rural transformation, governance and security in Africa. These works have underlined the importance of boosting Africa's economic, energy and digital transformation, to increase the value of human capital as an asset for the continent's autonomy and to be innovative in the research of adapted solutions to African problematics. The Royal Institute for Strategic Studies has also identified three major promising projects: Africa, a laboratory for an ecological future, continental mutualization and blue Africa. Such projects can accelerate development, create synergies and establish African leadership.



- As part of its climate change studies program, the Royal Institute for Strategic Studies has focused as early as 2007 on adaptation to climate change, an issue that impacts Africa more than any other continent in the world. Over the past few years, Morocco has distinguished itself in the fight against the effects of climate change. Besides organizing COP22, Morocco hosted the first African Summit of Action and launched the Triple A initiative, aimed at adapting African agriculture to the challenge of climate change. At the same time, the Kingdom has implemented an ambitious renewable energy program.
- The Institute has contributed to strategic reflection on intra-African migration and migration between Africa and Europe by organizing international meetings and studies at a time when Morocco is mandated to coordinate the action of the African Union on this issue, where it co-chairs the Global Forum for Migration and Development and where it will be hosting the International Conference on Migration in December 2018, during which the Global Pact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration will be adopted.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

To conclude, I would like to wish great success to this forum that gathers think tanks' representatives, with the aim of easing understanding between China and African countries and to favoring the edification of a better, more open and just world.



Annex

15 agreements signed to launch the Morocco-China Strategic Partnership

- **The first** agreement is an economic and industrial partnership memorandum aimed at strengthening cooperation between the two countries in sectors with high potential for job creation and added value, in particular automotive, textile/clothing, household appliances, aeronautics and logistics, as well as other sectors of common interest.
- **The second** agreement is a memorandum of understanding on the establishment of the Economic and Industrial Cooperation Zone.
- **The third** agreement is an extradition agreement under which both parties undertake to surrender to each other individuals, who being in the territory of one of the two States, are prosecuted or sentenced by the judicial authorities of the other State.
- **The fourth** agreement is a mutual assistance agreement in criminal matters.
- **The fifth** is an economic and technical cooperation agreement (100,000,000 Yuan grant).
- **The sixth** is a Memorandum of Understanding on the exemption of certain categories of visas and on the reciprocal simplification of procedures for issuing specific categories of visas. This memorandum of understanding provides for visa exemption for holders of Chinese "Passport(s) for Public Affairs" and Moroccan "Special Passport(s)" issued by the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, and facilitation of visa issuance procedures for Chinese nationals wishing to travel to Morocco for tourism purposes, as well as Moroccan and Chinese businessmen holding ordinary passports.
- **The seventh** is a memorandum of understanding on rail cooperation between China Railways and the Office National des Chemins de Fer (ONCF) of the Kingdom of Morocco.
- **The eighth** is a memorandum of understanding for enhanced cooperation in the infrastructure construction sector. The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide support to enterprises of both Parties in the infrastructure sector, including design, construction, installation, commissioning and operation as well as production, processing and supply of construction materials and equipment manufacturing, among other activities.
- **The ninth** is an implementation program for the Cultural Cooperation Agreement (2016-2020).
- **The tenth** is a cooperation agreement in the geology and mining sectors.
- **The eleventh** is a currency swap agreement between the Central Banks of both countries, namely Bank Al Maghrib and the People's Bank of China.

- **The twelfth** is a memorandum of understanding to strengthen cooperation in tourism, in particular by encouraging promotional activities by providing the necessary facilities on the basis of reciprocity, training professionals in the field of tourism, organizing internships and exchanges of experts, and collaboration between travel agencies and national tourism offices.
- **The thirteenth** is a cooperation agreement in the hydrocarbon and energy sectors. This memorandum covers the hydrocarbon (Oil exploration; Gas exploration; non-conventional hydrocarbons) and energy (electricity, renewable energy, energy efficiency) sectors.
- **The fourteenth** is a Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Imported and Exported Food Safety.
- **The fifteenth** is a Cooperation Agreement in the fields of Science, Technology and Defense Industry.

