



Interview Hans v. Helldorff – Jacobs University

Jacobs University:

1. As far as I know, there are several try-outs of EU-China-African three-party development projects taking place already, e.g. the Merowe Dam in Sudan. Do you see a future for trilateral cooperation between Germany, China and the Africa continent? What are other possible receiving countries, especially in Africa?

HvH:

There are existing three-party projects. This is what we are calling for, because we are convinced that these represent the best future for German companies and Chinese initiatives. The countries along the new silk road initiative would be promising for three-party development projects, including Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Poland, etc. The countries, among others are actively calling for increasing German initiative, because they have not been very successful with Chinese companies. While they are developing very quickly, most of these countries would prefer a three-party initiative, including Germany. However, I cannot present you any examples of three-party development projects with Chinese at the moment.

(For working with the Chinese initiatives,) we have an on-going internal discussion within Europe, which has not yet led to a final solution or policy. For example, take a look at Hungary, where the Chinese financed a railroad project, and the EU reacted very unfavorably. We say it should be the focus of the EU to do these projects. If the EU does it, there will be no more opportunity for the Chinese to come in to make the railroads, which originally should be have been done by the EU. This is meant specifically to support the EU member states. To further the political strategic interests of the EU, we should have a look at projects in Africa, in Caribbean countries, or even in Asian countries such as Pakistan or Afghanistan.

Which countries might be the receiving countries is simply a question of political stability. For instance when looking at Africa, we have to identify the countries, which have a fairly stable political environment. So that's the answer. I would say for the Europeans, yes, for the Chinese no. That's also one of the biggest differences.

Jacobs University:

2. The approaches of the EU on the one side and China on the other side in development policies in Africa are very different — the EU stresses the importance of sustainable development and of political reforms, e.g. in the field of good governance, and China's focus is on economic development and benefits. How do you think African countries are going to balance between the EU and the Chinese methods for their developments?



HvH:

German politicians are not very happy with the OBOR initiatives of the Chinese. The main problem right now is that the German focus on the initiatives is heavily focused on the pre-requisites, like human rights, etc.

Jacobs University:

3. Would you think such trilateral cooperation should focus on infrastructure projects or do you see other areas, such as Peace and Security?

HvH:

Exporting democracy and human rights is a clearly a major objective for European policymakers with regard to such trilateral cooperations. Simultaneously, a certain degree of political stability is a prerequisite for European companies justify the risk of investment. Particularly for Europe, the realization of infrastructure projects is not a problem of resources, but rather one of balancing risks and initiative. Unlike Europe, the Asian partners, such as China and the countries along the New Silk Road, are initially focusing on economic development, because economic stability will automatically increase political and social stability as well.

The trilateral efforts should thus be viewed as political icebreakers. If a political union, like the EU, wants to participate worldwide in development projects, we urge them to focus less on the “artificial fireworks” and give more focus to taking initiative on the infrastructure development as a means to reaching the goal of increasing political stability. For these early-stage trilateral cooperations both infrastructure development and political stability development are important and the challenge is to find the right balance for each project.

Jacobs University:

4. What is Germany’s stance on German-Chinese-African development projects? From the German perspective, what would you think could be the biggest advantage for such a trilateral cooperation? What would be the biggest limitations or worries?

HvH:

Economic and political development tend to move at different speeds. If the economy waits the politicians to act, these projects will. However, political support is often critical to these ambitious projects. Therefore, there is a need for both industry and political support. As long as you give industry the freedom to develop their own projects, which influence the political sphere, you will automatically achieve both economic and political development. Therefore we actively engage with the industries as well as the politicians, and try to explain that industry alone cannot develop the final political goals, just as politics is also not able to achieve its own goals without the industry. As long as the economics grows, you will have a

peaceful development in those societies. This simple truth can be difficult to explain to the politicians.

My impression of many talks is that it is easier to talk to the Chinese politicians to explain what is needed to be done, than German and the EU politicians. In a recent conversation with the Chinese Ambassador in Berlin, and he was asking for the continuous development of trust to further the politico-economic working relationship between China and Germany. You will never hear that from the European or German side, or at least I haven't heard it so far. Imagine talking to the representative of the second largest economic nation and he explains you that they find it frustrating that nobody really asks seriously for the real motivation of the Chinese government. Why is that not the key question on the table?

The Chinese are also focusing on the situation in America. The Americans view the success of the Chinese OBOR initiative as threat to America's economic position in the global market. Thus, America exerts pressure on the European, and particularly the German, economy. Many global mid-size and large companies with business interests in Europe, America and Asia, feel pressured by America with regard to their dealings with Chinese companies, because of artificial pitfalls created by the Americans.

The Europeans have sent troops to South Sudan to help their military stabilize the region, but what comes next? What happens once that military goal has been achieved? Have you ever heard of a plan? Most of these political decisions that are aiming to help other countries, haven't be thought through to the end. As long as there is no plan to integrate the political powers in the receiving countries, to build up stable future-oriented growing-economy countries, there will be no freedom. For example in Afghanistan, the fight against terrorism is ongoing and likely will be for the next three or four decades. So, whom does it help? This is a serious question.

We need to go into those countries not to wage war or to align with a political party in that country, but to help with the development of strategic infrastructure projects, which are the core of the future development of these economies. That is the only way to make a lasting difference and would give everyone in the receiving country a chance to become a part of a winning situation. It's easy to shoot somebody, but it's not easy to help give somebody the opportunity to earn a living. In such a future oof economic stability and growth, there is no reason to shoot somebody. Unfortunately, that is simply not the way many politicians think. That is not to say that the Chinese are the peace-keepers of the world. They simply have their own ideas and their own strategies. They want to achieve a particular position in the world. And socio-economic development through infrastructure-development initiatives like the OBOR initiative is the strategy that they have developed to attain that goal. In my opinion, this is the one and only sensible strategy.

[Jacobs University:](#)

5. The concept of helping Africa in order to mitigate the refugee crisis in Europe was raised by Germany. Have other EU countries reached a consensus on this point? Aside from the refugee crisis, what would be the incentives for Germany/the EU to participate in such a trilateral cooperation project?

HvH:

To be honest, the comparison to colonialism as a political argument is very cheap, for both sides. It's a cheap argument used only because those countries had colonies in Africa and Asia under very different global political circumstances that have nothing to do with the current situation. Today, this argument is equated to the practice of giving a lot of money and support without any visible success. If you compare that with the projects the Chinese have set up so far, it is a completely different way of management. The Chinese manage these projects much smarter, because they develop their projects domestically and bring in a lot of engineering and management. They help these countries develop key infrastructure projects and then they leave some engineering and management sources in these countries to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the project. It doesn't work in every country, but the projects are achieved with unbelievable speed and success, in comparison to the political development activities of the EU, for example. The European discussion is stuck on a discussion on moral points of view and the past preventing progress, instead of developing political strategies to guide the future.

Why do companies come to Africa? Because they want to secure the resources in Africa for their economy. If there is coal, or mining, this is what the Chinese are interested in, because they need the resources for the future, for their own economy. That's it. And no, the German side and the European side don't have the same ideology. They have moral motivations, to eliminate the guilt of their colonial past in these areas. It's a moral, not an economy-driven motivation, which causes tremendous inefficiencies and spending money without producing any tangible results. When you compare the EU strategies and the Chinese strategies, you must come to the result that the EU strategies are inherently inefficient. For example, unlike the Chinese, the EU attempts to hold the receiving countries to the same human rights standards as Europe before they are eligible to receive financial support for these projects. Such discussions and prerequisites do not happen with China or America prior to the project but only with Europe. Instead, Europe must realize that economic development and the resulting increase in social stability is the fastest and most efficient way to create the conditions in which improvements to human rights can happen.

Efficiency is the most important thing to create projects, which could be successful at the end of the day.