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East Africa

# THE CLASH OF SYSTEMS

## African Perceptions of the European Union and China Engagement

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# Imprint

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# Abstract

The centuries-old European values and systems model exported to Africa has found itself in an unfamiliar territory with the entry of China's economic statecraft model. The findings of the Africa perception survey on the activities of the European Union (EU) and China in Africa are based on primary data from more than a thousand respondents from 25 countries that gauges the ongoing tight competition between the EU and China in Africa. Overall, both China and the EU are

perceived to be deploying debt-trap diplomacy. China emerges the favourite in non-interference in the internal affairs of African nation-states; in quick decision making, and timely completion of infrastructure projects. The EU rates highly on soft power exchanges, high standards and climate change consciousness. The results show that China is closing in on the EU on many fronts, including where the EU traditionally presumed to have commanded an unassailable lead.

## **Inter Region Economic Network (IREN Kenya)**

The Rating Survey was sponsored by  
the Friedrich Naumann Foundation Global Partnership Hub

# Executive Summary

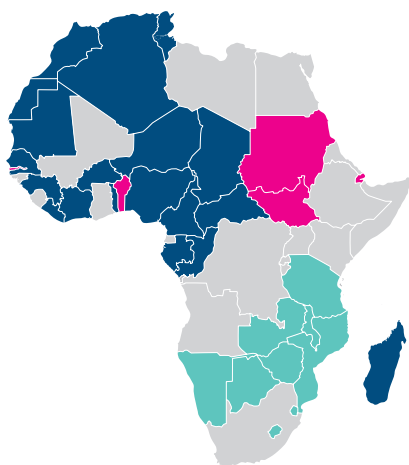
The European influence in Africa dates back several centuries but China, a latecomer, has for the last 15 years made inroads into the continent and made great strides in all-round, multi-level and wide-ranging co-operation. The Africa- Europe and Africa-China engagements are attracting growing attention due to their clear demonstration of a clash of systems. The European Union's belief in the superiority of its values, especially the liberal democratic model that is exported to Africa,

is clearly under threat from the Chinese economic statecraft model that is rated high in quick decision making, faster and efficient delivery on projects and non-interference in the internal affairs of African nation-states. The graphic illustration on trade below resoundingly confirms China's decisive takeover in Africa. It contrasts China's limited footprint in Africa in 2000 to the pervasive foray in 2019, realised within only two decades.

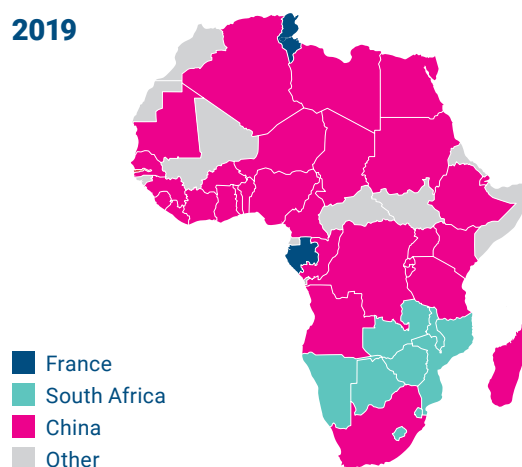
## China's Africa Trade Takeover – Top Source country for imports in African countries

Europe has had forays in Africa since the 15<sup>th</sup> century but in just over Two Decades, China has grown to become the Biggest Foreign player on the continent. The economic and military transformation of China leaves no doubt that the center of the world will revolve around China. China has become a superpower.

2000



2019



Based on share of total value of imports. South Sudan became independent from Sudan in 2011.

Sources: OEC, World Bank, Statista Research

This report captures the African perception of the ongoing European Union (EU) and China engagement in Africa using primary data drawn from respondents from over 25 African countries and Diaspora Africans spread across 12 countries. The European Union and China Engagement Perception Survey was carried out over the period October – December 2021. It captures perceptions from over 1,000 respondents that represented 62% of the targeted sample size. The participating respondents were drawn mostly from the academia, journalists, think tanks, researchers, non-governmental organizations, regional economic bodies in Africa, and government agencies.

Lack of objective assessments and up-to-date studies on the unfolding scenarios shaping geopolitics tends to conceal deep truths from sight, hence allowing the excesses of unverified but popular misconceptions and assumptions to thrive. Research findings based on fresh data and current opinions empower decision makers to deliver on more viable structural interventions and policies. It is for this reason that the Friedrich Naumann Foundation Global Hub, a German/European Foundation based in Nairobi, Kenya, commissioned the Inter Region Economic Network (IREN) to produce an objective and balanced research paper that reflects and analyses the African perspective on this important topic.

The aggressive entry of China's "non-value systems" largely characterized as "hardware" is challenging the European Union "values-led system" largely characterized as "software" engagement with Africa. Africans perceive China to be the best in quick decision-making, giving it positive votes at 75.2% against the European Union's 55.8%. The positive votes also rate China highly in timely completion of projects at 81.1% against the European Union's 69.4%. The EU leads in terms of supporting private sector growth with 38.7% voting it up to be above average in performance, China scoring 24.0% as the above-average vote. In debt diplomacy, both rate above the 50% mark with China at 66.4% and the European Union at 58.9%. The European Union is perceived to have a commanding lead on soft power-related activities such as the arts at 77.6% against China's 49.2%. On gender and human rights, the EU scores positive votes at 71.1% against China's 40.2% and has the above-average score of 59.9% on human rights advocacy against China's 27.0%. On transparency with open negotiations, the EU has a positive score of 66.9% against China's 56.0%. The summary table below consolidates the details of the positive shares, based on the sum of participants who answered somewhat agreeable, agreeable, or very agreeable.

	Key Area	China (%)	EU (%)
1	Open negotiations	56	66.9
2	Empowerment of SME businesses	66.6	76.6
3	Better conditions on investments	70.6	69.8
4	Quick decisions	75.2	55.8
5	Quick project completion	81.1	69.4
6	Good quality	67.9	93.5
7	Employment of local labour force/job creation	71.7	84.8
8	Labour standards	55.7	70.5
9	Environmental standards	58.5	82.5
10	Child labour and human rights	50.6	62.3
11	Non-interference in internal affairs	68.1	57.5
12	Human rights advocacy	27	71.1
13	Use of corrupt tendencies	61	40.8
14	Treating Africans as equal partners	51.4	61.3
15	Long-term strategy	70.8	78.3
16	Conservation of indigenous knowledge	48.6	67.6
17	Artistic exchange – popular	49.2	77.6

In interpreting the detailed numbers presented in this report, it should be noted that the percentage figures in the infographics only indicate the positive rating as voted up by the corresponding share of the total responses. Negative and neutral ratings were also part of the seven-point scale used in the survey. The overall rating is represented by a weighted average, presented as mean values in the report. The mean values are key to getting the big picture of the overall evaluation of performance the respondents gave to the EU and China on the same question.

The report shows that China is clearly closing in on the European Union's influence in Africa. China has demonstrated ability to manage its engagement with Africa's 55 nation-states and is effectively on the road to counter the European Union's 27 member states' traditional stronghold in Africa. The report raises curious policy questions for the three actors, namely:

- I. Will the ongoing competing interests of the European Union or those of China be at the expense of Africa?
- II. Is a strategic competition feasible to enable the three actors to benefit from the competition?
- III. What type of diplomatic re-calibration is needed in the unfolding new order in Africa?
- IV. What is the role of African agency in the unfolding clash of systems?

The neck-to-neck mean scores of China and the EU on more than 80% of the questions, never going beyond a difference of one level when rounded off on an integer scale (5 against 4 if not 4 against 3), raise a compelling perception that China will easily **close the gap and overtake the EU** on most of the aspects of partnership with Africa. The respondents characterized the unfolding competition between the European Union and China in Africa variously, for instance, in negative terms: "powder keg," "gloomy future for Africa," "shaky," "time to get rid of the EU," and in positive terms namely, "great opportunity to bargain," "promising buffet menu," and "opportunity for growth."

The EU's perceived complacency deep rooted in its legacy thinking and "paternalistic approach to Africa" is confronted with an agile China's strategy that is breaking new ground in Africa. China is apparently putting an advanced region and home to both the first and second scientific revolution on the defensive and survivalism mode. An aggressive re-awakening with the drive and rigour of a fallen hero determined to reclaim lost glory is the bare minimum approach the EU needs to engage with urgency.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the Study

Africa has for centuries been an active playing field for the Europeans, currently under the European Union. The EU and China, the subjects of this study, are two of Africa's largest trading partners. The third is the US, which is not a part of the study. The accelerated entry of China into the game signals the urgent need for policy makers in the European Union to invest in forecasting on the future.

Due to realignments in the world order and emerging circumstances, it has become critical to re-examine and re-invent Africa's partnership with other regional blocs and countries in terms of investments, trade, and socio-political engagements. The European Union and China are of key interest. China's immense investment in Africa without regard to the continent's human rights issues has introduced a new dynamic within Africa's political-economic architecture. This 'business is business' type of aid worries the EU and other traditional donors, whose own African aid programmes have not met development goals.

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF) is a German/European foundation interested in better understanding the activities of, and competition between, Europe and China in the field of development cooperation and investments in Africa. Recognizing the recent unfolding scenarios shaping geopolitics, the FNF commissioned the Inter Region Economic Network (IREN) to conduct an independent study focusing on the African perspective on this topic, with a view of providing new insights and recommendations for policymakers and experts for development cooperation in Europe.

IREN Kenya has over the years built institutional capacity in geopolitical matters through its annual Eastern Africa Thought Leaders and Africa Resource Bank forums. IREN Kenya pioneered non-state-led meetings on Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) meetings from 2010 – 2015 on

topics such as Peace and Security Cooperation; China-Africa Think Tanks Forum, China-Africa Media Forum and China-Africa Joint Research and Exchange Programme. IREN Kenya has since 2001 been collaborating with European organizations on development cooperation and how to further partnerships that are beneficial to both Africa and the European Union.

## 1.2 Study Objectives and Rationale

The overall study objective was to assess the state of Africa's partnerships with the European Union and China in terms of investments, trade, and socio-political engagements. To address this overall objective, the following specific objectives guided the primary data collection.

- I. To analyze key success highlights of Africa's engagement with the European Union and China in the fields of investment, trade, security, and socio-political interaction.
- II. To analyze key barriers and the weak or missing links in Africa's engagement with the European Union and China in the fields of investment, trade, security, and socio-political interaction.
- III. To assess the most current public perception of Africa's engagement with the European Union and China in terms of transparency, quality, and outcomes in fields of engagement.
- IV. To recommend concrete steps for European and African policy makers how to react on China's growing influence in Africa.

The research findings should feed into policymaking. This study sought to bring on board most current and fresh viewpoints collected from across the eight Regional Economic Blocs (RECs) of Africa, as per the African Union delineation.

## 2. Methodology

Literature review helped to set right the key questions that should guide an objective interrogation of the Africa-EU and the Africa-China partnerships. A further step towards getting answers from respondents on the ground was essential, being an effective way of capturing the current facts shaping the mainstream perspectives on the partnerships. The study engaged the following procedures, tools, and methods.

### 2.1 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was applied. The purposive sample size had a planned distribution of 1,645 respondents drawn as per Regional Economic Blocs (REC) as shown in Table 1. A mixed-methods approach was applied to collect, examine, analyze and synthesize both quantitative and qualitative data and metrics. The process and procedures included:

- I. desk research for stakeholder mapping, situation analysis and identification of weak areas and missing links;
- II. purposive sampling and interviews of key informants (five per member state – Ministries in charge of Finance, Trade, Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Culture or Regional Cooperation to be given priority) and primary actors (ten per member state) in the fields of investment, trade, security, and socio-political interaction – respondents drawn from all the eight RECs and categorized into government, academia, private sector, and civil society; and
- III. twenty respondents drawn from the EU and twenty from China.

**Table 1 | Sampling of respondents from Africa, the EU, and China**

AFRICA				
Rec	Member states	Key informants sample	Primary actors sample	Total
Arab Maghreb Union (UMA)	5	25	50	75
Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)	19	95	190	285
Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)	29	145	290	435
East African Community (EAC)	6	30	60	90
Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)	10	50	100	150
Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS)	15	75	150	225
Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)	8	40	80	120
Southern African Development Community (SADC)	15	75	150	225
PARTNERS				
China		10	10	20
European Union (EU)	27	10	10	20
	<b>Total</b>	<b>555</b>	<b>1090</b>	<b>1,645</b>

Source:

### 2.2 Online Survey Schedule

An online questionnaire with ninety-two (92) questions was administered on Survey-Planet platform to the respondents identified from the eight blocs in Africa and China and the EU. The respondents were selected based on their role, professional occupation, engagement and/or and knowledge of the study subject. Questions that seek overall agreement or disagreement levels with the general statements about the relationships between Africa and the EU and China were structured into a scale ranging from “very disagreeable” to “very agreeable”, with “neutral” as the transition point. The respondents were both key informants and primary actors in the fields of investment, trade, security, and socio-political interaction.

### 2.3 Conceptual and Analytical Model

The scaling adopted for most of the structured questions varied from 1 = “very disagreeable” to 7= “very agreeable”, with “neutral” as the transition point (4). A mean score of 4 is, therefore, a vote for neutrality or indifference. This kind of scaling, conceptually, is like a downward-curving parabola, where the negative gradient reduces (disagreement levels) to the neutral point (zero gradient), and then there is an increase on the other side, of positive gradient (agreement levels).

The overall level of agreement from the responses, **A**, was conceptualized to be the average rating. This was computed as the product of each scale value and the relative abundance



of the respective responses, expressible as a percentage or a fraction of the total responses to the respective question. The following mathematical equations simplify the conceptual model.

$$A = \sum_{i=1}^n (i * r_i)$$

where  $i$  is an integer scale value ranging from 1 to  $n$  and  $r_i$  is the relative abundance of the respondents (a fraction or percentage of the total) choosing the respective scale ranking  $i$ .

In cases dealing with scaling alternatives or strategies against criteria with varying perceived weights, the equation above had to be reformulated to:

$$A_i = \sum_{j=1}^n (s_{i,j} * w_j)$$

for  $i = 1, 2, 3, \dots, m$ , where  $m$  is the total number of alternatives or strategies to be rated against the predefined  $n$  criteria.

In the formula,  $w_j$  is the weight, normalized to sum up to unity, each assigned by the researcher based on experience or informed expert opinion to the criteria varying from  $1$  to  $n$ , while  $s_{i,j}$  is the array of (utility) scalar values scored by the respondents to rate the performance of the alternatives or strategies on the respective criteria.  $A_i$  is the overall score for a specific alternative or strategy against all the evaluation criteria.

Because  $A_i$  is a composite value, it gives a summative outcome – a “black box”. To shed more light into the “black box”, the individual responses were also analyzed and grouped into percentages of negative and positive clusters. Neutral responses indicated indifference to the expressed facts or opinions. This additional re-classification was an attempt at improving the analysis to a more insightful “grey box”. The detailed analysis and evaluation stages involved the following:

- I. perception assessment and modelling informed by scaling for estimating the level of transparency, quality, and value of the outcomes as derived from criteria-based normalization and ranking;
- II. thesis construction; and
- III. stakeholder validation through interactive presentations and forum held in Nairobi on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2022.

# 3. Results and Discussion of Theses

The primary data survey received a total of 1,014 respondents, making up 61.6% response rate. Given the virtual conditions under which the survey was conducted mainly due to COVID-19, this is an impressive response rate. Statistically, a minimum of thirty respondents per bloc would suffice, or a total of 300 for the ten blocs. The more than 900 respondents, therefore, exceeded the threshold required for a compelling generalization of the dominant and informed views.

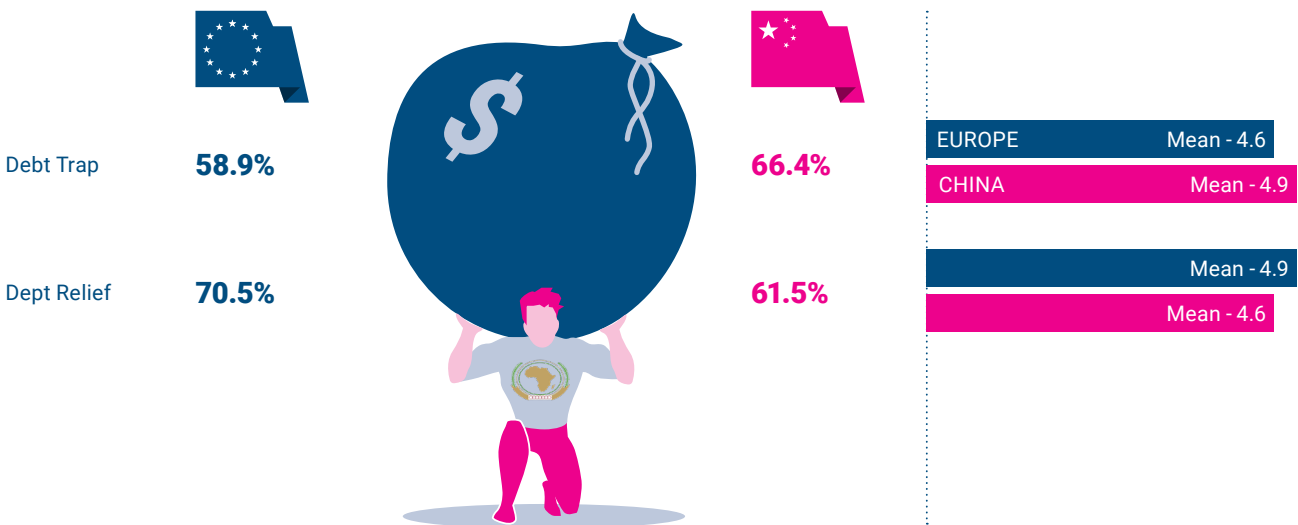
This section presents the infographics. The percentages represent the positive votes or the share of the results that were above average. The mean values, however, represent the overall evaluation upon considering all the responses, whether positive, negative, or neutral.

## 3.1 The Infographics

The responses were rated on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 depending on the strength of agreement or disagreement to the question raised about China or the EU and how each relates with Africa on the question raised. The responses were then analyzed by clustering the positive responses on the one hand and the negative ones on the other – leaving out the neutral responses to represent indifference. Again, the overall rating was represented by a composite index calculated as a weighted average.

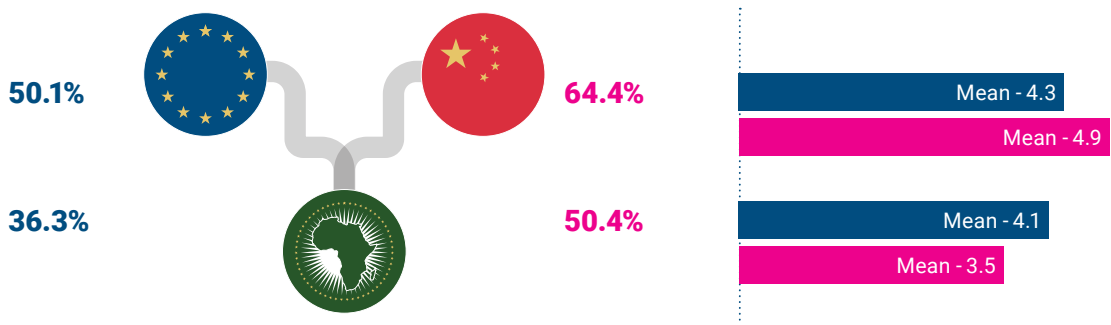
### Graphic 1 | Debt Trap Diplomacy

China at 66.4% is perceived to trap Africa into debt more than the EU at 58.9%. The EU at 70.5% on the other hand is perceived to accord Africa more debt relief than China at 61.5%.



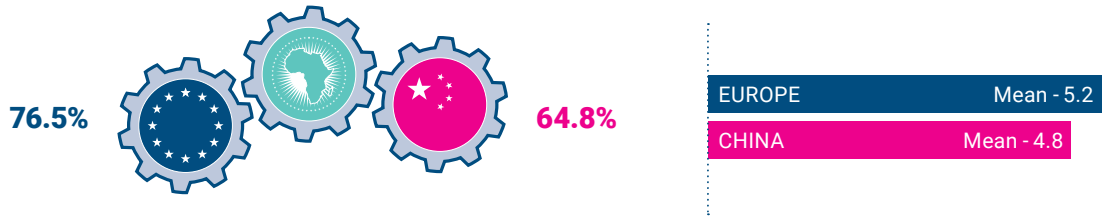
### Graphic 2 | Non-Interference in African Internal Affairs

On Non-Interference in Africa's Internal Affairs China is rated at 64.4% and the European Union 50.1%. The EU is perceived to treat Africans as equals at 50.4% compared to China at 36.3%.



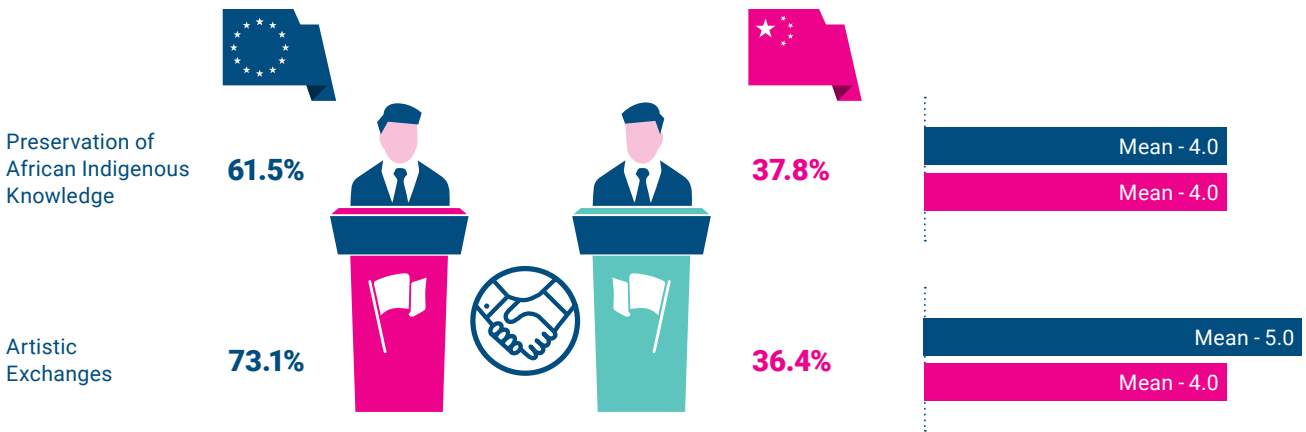
### Graphic 3 | Strategic Cooperation

The European Union is perceived to be long term oriented in Africa at 76.5% compared to China at 64.8%



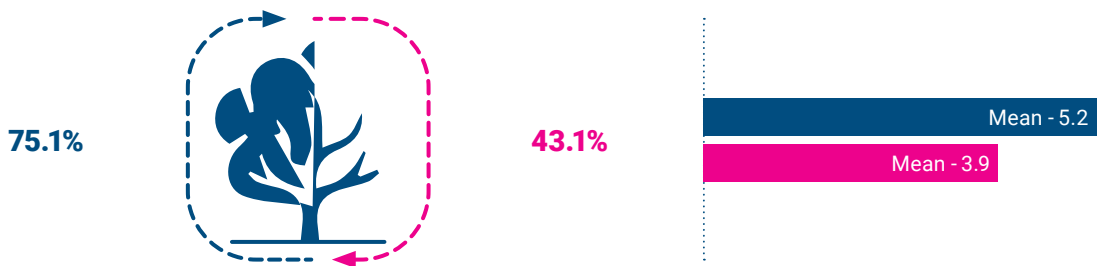
### Graphic 4 | Soft Power Exchanges

The EU at 73.1% is perceived to score highly in the deployment of soft power compared to China at 36.4%



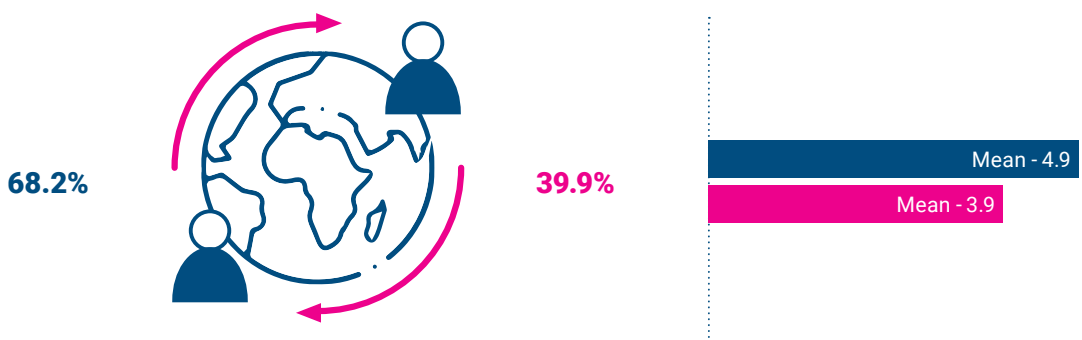
### Graphic 5 | Climate Change

The EU at 75.1% is perceived to lead on climate change engagements in Africa compared China at 43.1%



### Graphic 6 | Migration

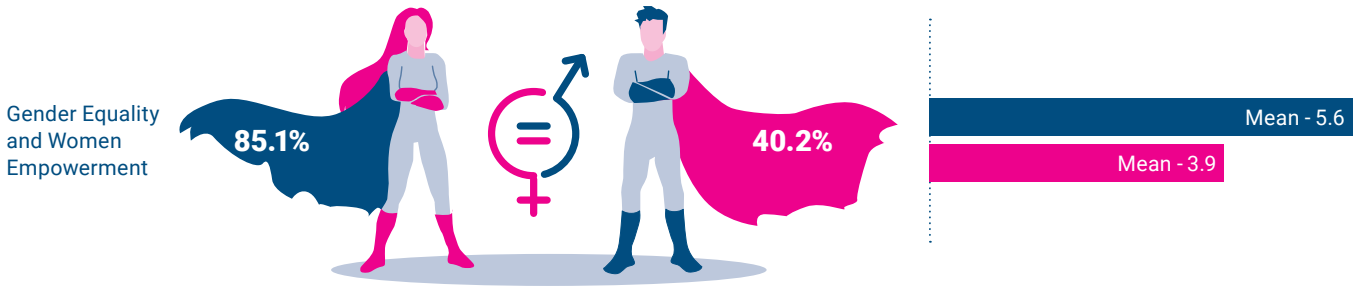
The EU at 68.2% is perceived to be keener on migration issues compared to China at 39.9%



## 12 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THESE

### Graphic 7 | Gender and Human Rights

The EU at 85.1% is perceived to rate highly compared to China's 40.2% score on gender equality and women empowerment.



The EU is also perceived to be keen on human rights advocacy at 59.9% than China at 14.8%.

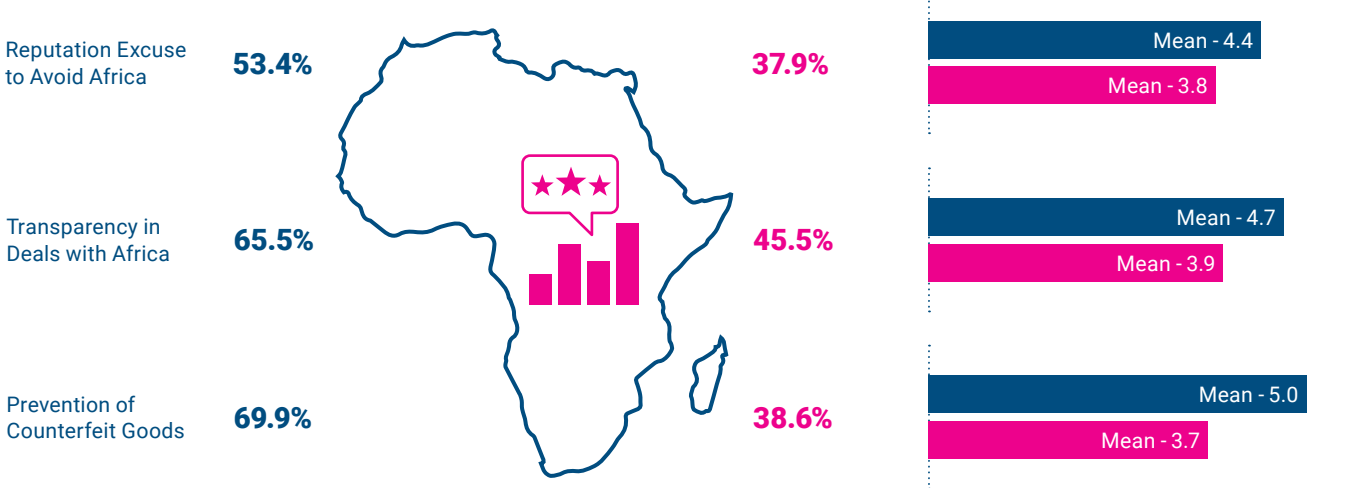


### Graphic 8 | Reputation, Ethics and Transparency Corruption

The EU is perceived to use the reputation excuse to avoid Africa at 53.4% compared to China at 37.9%

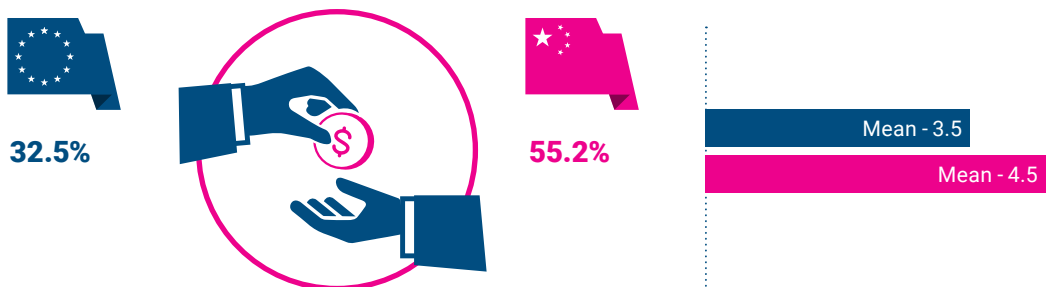
The EU at 65.5% is perceived to be more transparent in its deals with Africa compared to China at 45.5%

The EU standards are perceived to prevent counterfeit goods at 69.9%; China 38.6%



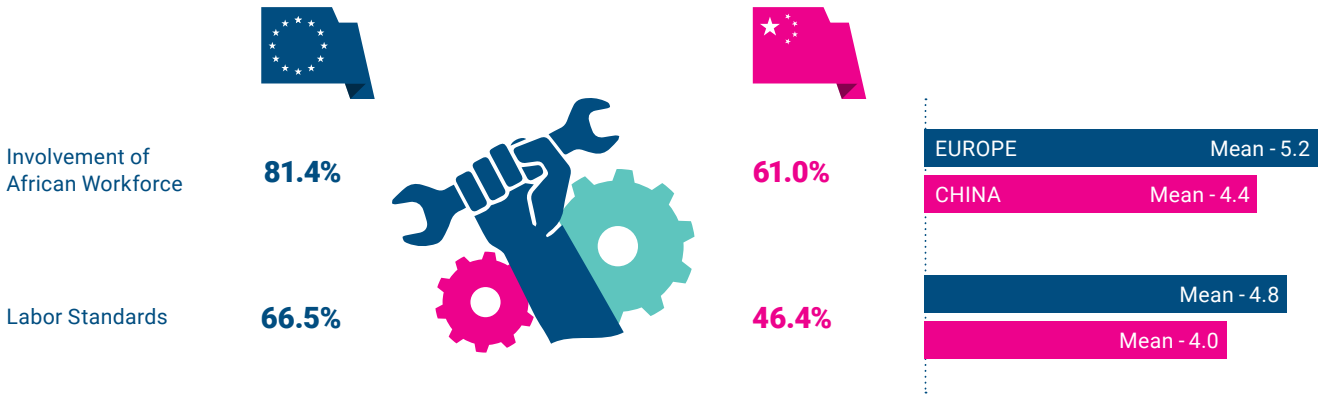
### Graphic 9 | Corruption

Both China and the EU are perceived to use corruption as a tool – China at 55.2%; The EU at 32.5%



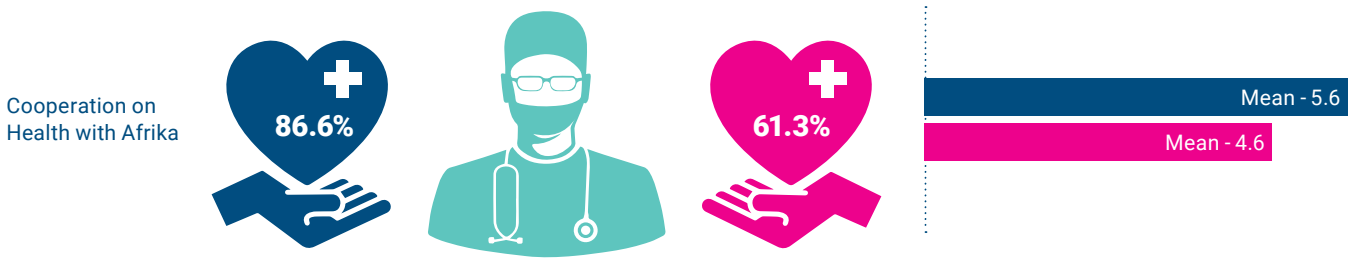
### Graphic 10 | Employment, Jobs, and Labour Standards

The EU at 81.4% is perceived to involve the African workforce compared to China at 61.0%  
 The EU is perceived to be more keen on executing labour standards at 66.5% than China at 46.4%



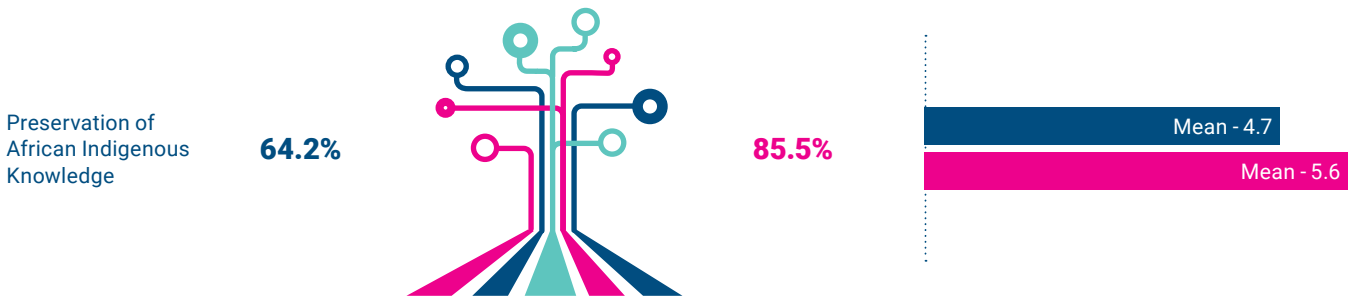
### Graphic 11 | Managing Pandemics and Public Health

The EU's health cooperation at 86.6% is perceived to be more pronounced than China's at 61.3%



### Graphic 12 | Infrastructure Development in Africa

China is perceived to lead in supporting infrastructure development in Africa at 85.5% compared to the EU at 64.2%



### Graphic 13 | Economic Cooperation

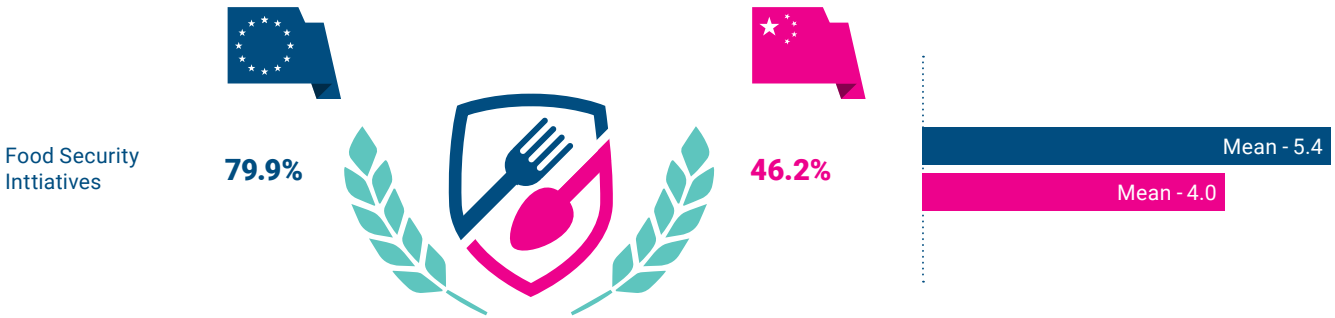
China at 52.5% is apparently closing the gap on economic cooperation with the EU at 61.5%



**14 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THESE**

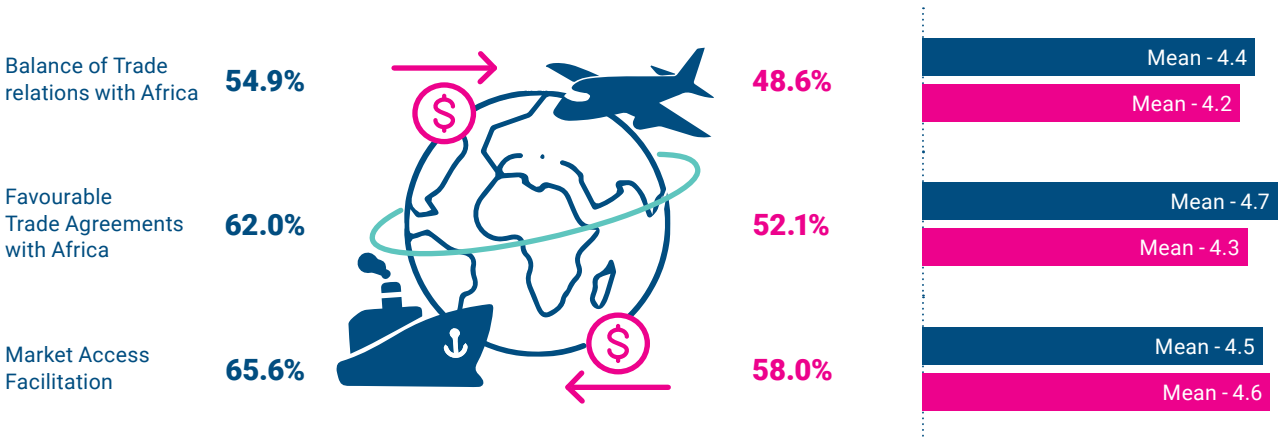
**Graphic 14 | Food Security**

The EU at 79.9% is perceived to lead in food security initiatives in Africa compared to China rates 46.2%



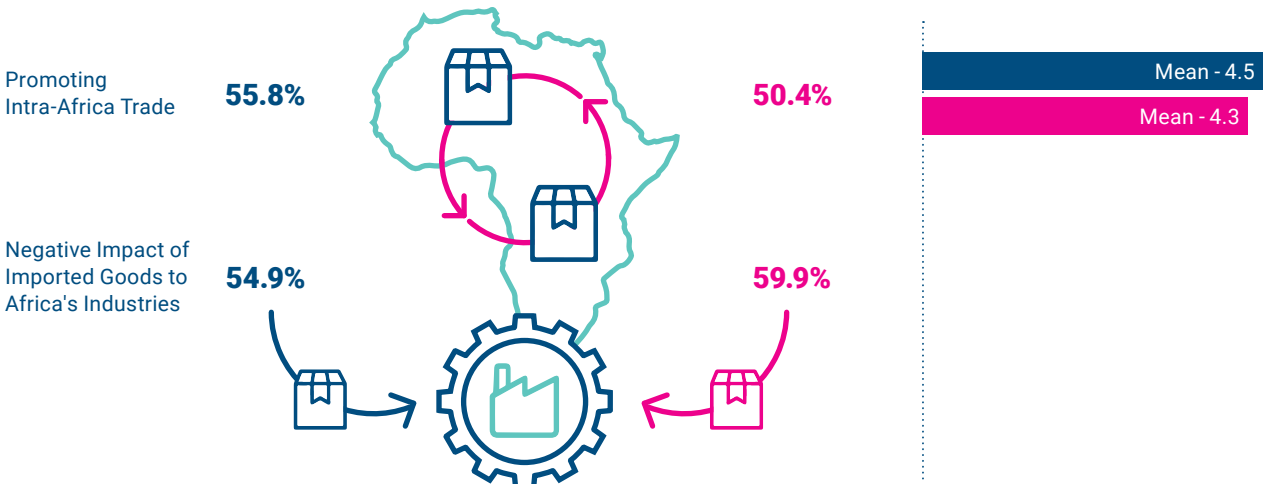
**Graphic 15 | Balance of Trade and Market Access**

On Trade relations with Africa, the EU scores 54.9% against China's 48.6%.  
 The EU scores 62.0% on favourable trade agreements with Africa compared to China's 52.1%.  
 The EU at 65.6% is perceived to facilitate market access more than China at 58.0%



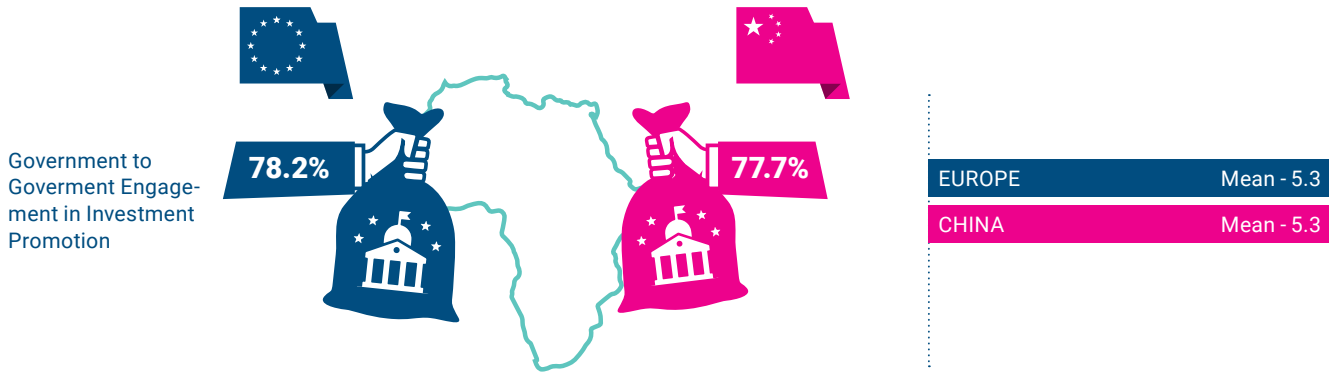
**Graphic 16 | Intra Africa Trade and Investments**

The EU at 55.8% is perceived to lead in promoting Intra-Africa Trade compared to China at 50.4%.  
 Negative Impact of imported goods to Africa's Industries the EU 54.9%; China 59.9%



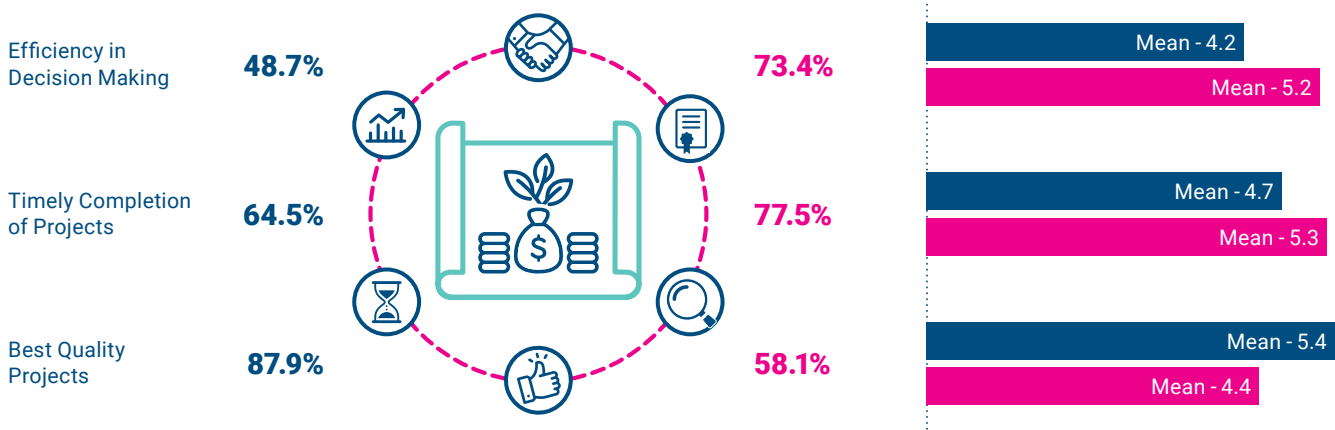
### Graphic 17 | State-Led Investments

The EU at 78.2% and China at 77.7% are perceived to be at par in government to government engagement in investment promotion



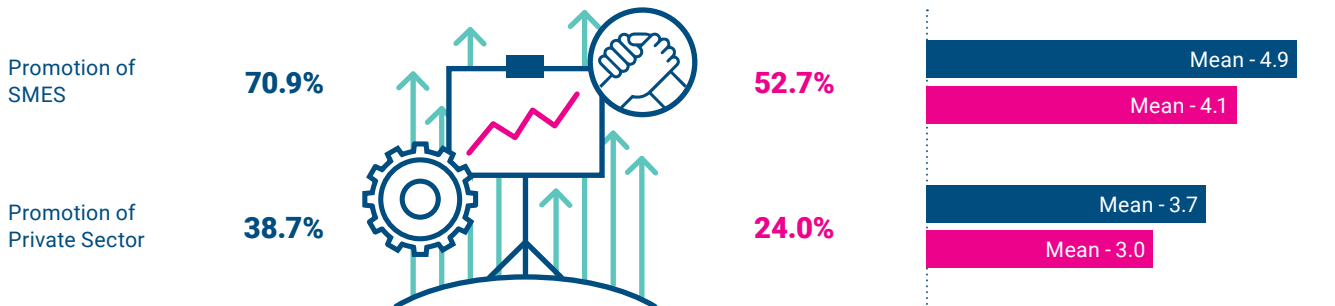
### Graphic 18 | Investment Quality and Efficiency in Decision Making

China at 73.4% is perceived to be ahead of the EU 48.7% in efficiency in decision making  
 China at 77.5% is perceived to have a commanding lead over the EU at 64.5% on timely completion of  
 On quality projects, the EU at 87.9% is perceived to lead compared to China at 58.1%



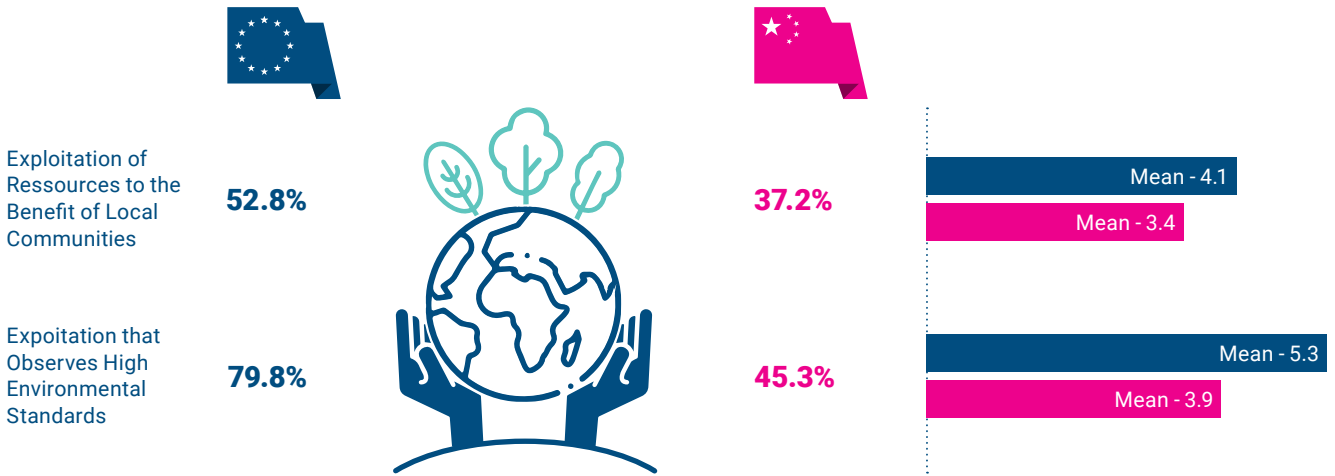
### Graphic 19 | Promotion of Private Sector and SMEs

The EU at 70.9% is perceived to be way ahead of China at 52.7% on promotion of SMES  
 The EU apparently leads in promoting Private Sector growth with 38.7% voting it up as above average against 24.0% as the above-average score for China.



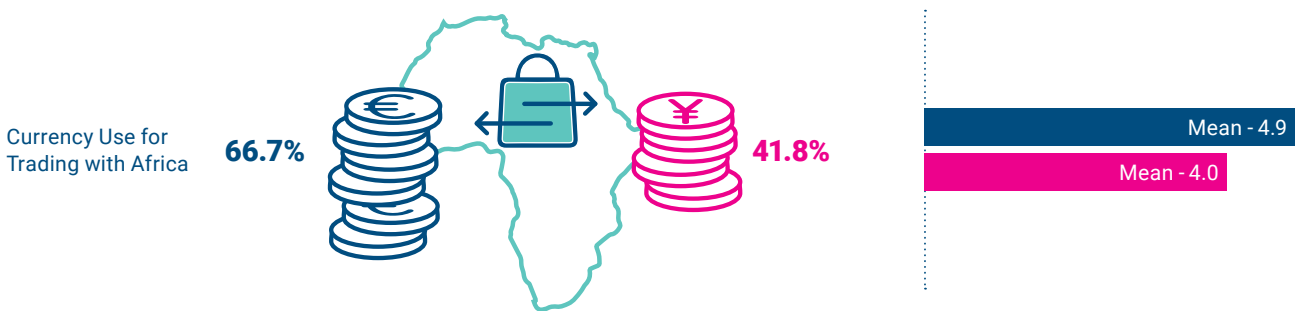
### Graphic 20 | Natural Resource Exploitation and Environmental Standards

On exploitation of resources to the benefit of local communities - the EU received a 52.8% vote compared to China's 37.2%  
 On exploitation that observes high environmental standards – the EU was perceived to lead at 79.8%; compared to China 45.3%



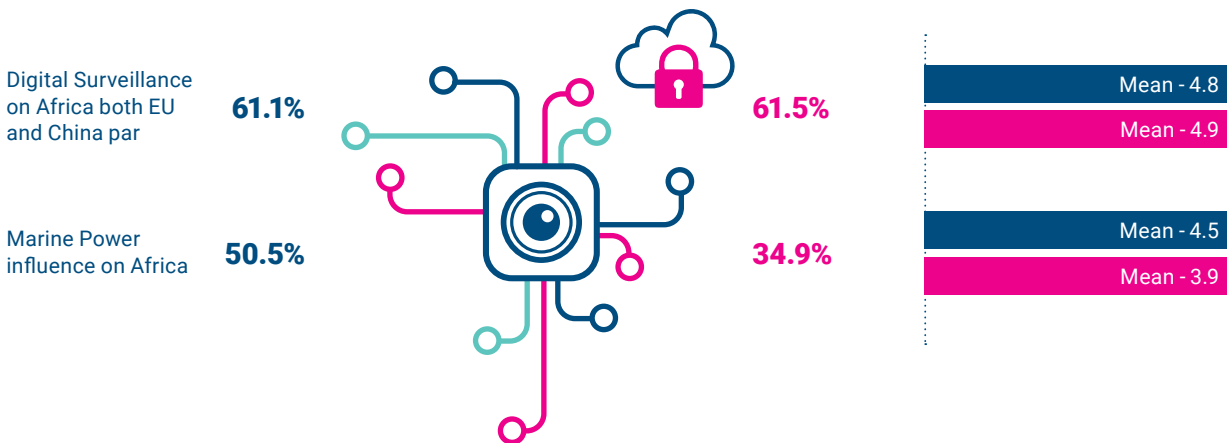
### Graphic 21 | International Currency

The EU was perceived to use the Euro at 66.7%; while China was perceived to promote the Yuan at 41.8% for trading with Africa.



### Graphic 22 | Digital Surveillance and Data Security

- Digital Surveillance on Africa - both the EU 61.1% and China at 61.5% were perceived to be at par
- The EU Marine Power influence on Africa was rated at 50.5% while China's was rated at 34.9%





## 3.2 Detailed Results and Discussion of Emerging Theses

From the comprehensive primary data survey, a definite convergence on twenty-two theses was reached. Aligned to the theses, this section delves deeper into the facts and figures and what they mean for the evolving trajectory of competition between the EU and China.

**China is gaining ground and is set to outperform the EU Although the EU scores higher than China on most of the performance indicators, China is still gaining ground in Africa faster than the EU.** This paradoxical outcome can be explained by the mathematics of non-uniform criteria weights, as judged in the eye of the user, in this case the Africans and African states. Evidently, China scores much better than the EU on the criteria that are the weightiest to Africa, hence giving it a superior overall advantage in appearing attractive to Africa. The stakeholder forum held in Nairobi also confirmed the narrative that Africa is likely to rebel against Europe while embracing China as a friendlier contemporary in development and peer to get along with easily as opposed to the metaphorical parent that is Europe.

The tangibles of infrastructure and the impressive speed of decisions and project completion that China has perfected are a necessity for a continent that is late in meeting development essentials, thus developing cold feet on the straight jacket of slow-paced bureaucratic ideals that the EU epitomizes. The multiple nations within the EU, with their diverse positions on any subject matter, may continue to aggravate the slow pace of decisions as China races ahead as a single country with speedy decision-making.

### Infrastructure Development in Africa

**China triumphs in the tangibles while Europe dominates the abstract in Africa.** When it comes to building big things in Africa, China is unrivalled. Beijing-backed firms have redrawn the continent's map in terms of rails, roads, bridges, ports, skyscrapers, dams, among others. The perception on China (5.6) was more favourable against the EU (4.7) on development assistance for physical infrastructure. The details of the score in favour of China showed that 85.5% of the vote was positive for China, far ahead of the positive vote for the EU (64.2%). The negative vote was higher for the EU (27.3%) than for China (10.4%). Ranking higher than the EU on physical infrastructure as a critical pillar for mobility, connectivity and market integration is a respected achievement for China and portends its upward gains over the EU.

### Debt Diplomacy

**Both China and the EU unleash debt diplomacy on Africa.** China has been accused of putting developing countries into "debt traps" by offering unsustainable loans for BRI projects, which can then be leveraged for political influence or concessions of geostrategic value to China. This contested theory has, however, been debunked. Both China and the EU were rated at close range on the aspect of advancing debt-trap economic policies and engagements in Africa. The average rating for China was 4.9 with 66.4% affirmative vote against 4.6 for

the EU with 58.9% affirmative vote, a difference of 7.5%. The opposing vote against exercising debt-trap policies was 20.5% for China and 29.2% for the EU, a paltry difference of 8.7%. On offering debt relief to heavily indebted African countries, China (4.6 with 61.5% positive rating) posted a comparable score to the EU (4.9 with 70.5% positive rating), a 9% difference. The alternative (opposing) vote to the record of exercising debt relief in Africa was 21.0% for the EU and 29.6% for China.

### Economic Cooperation

The EU (4.6) did not score much better than China (4.2) on favourable terms and conditions of economic aid extended to African states. The positive vote in favour of the EU on this measure was 61.5% and 29.3% negative, compared to China's 52.5% positive and 38.6% negative rating. This indicates that China is closing in on the EU on the terms and conditions of economic aid extended to African states. The EU surpassed China with a 9% margin positioning China as a formidable and strategic competitor to the EU.

### Trade and Market Access

**China is eating into the EUs economic orbit on balance of trade relations.** China is exerting the highest gravitational pull even on the so-called major market economies. China and the EU were perceived to be at par on balance of trade relations with Africa (4.2 for China and 4.4 for the EU). The positive vote for the EU of 54.9% against China's 48.6%, beating China by a mere 6.3%. The negative vote against promoting balance of trade relations with all the African states put together was 31.9% for the EU and 36.5% for China, another close competition.

Maintaining the offensive against the EU, China and the EU were perceived to be at par (4.3 for China with 52.1% positive vote and 4.7 for the EU with 62.0% positive vote) on favourable trade agreement terms with Africa. The negative votes amounted to 24.8% for the EU and 35.4% for China.

The perception index on addressing trade in counterfeit goods in Africa was in favour of the EU at 5.0 with 69.9% positive vote against China's 3.7 with 38.6% positive vote – not a wide difference as one would expect going by popular discourse. The negative result was 18.1% for the EU and 49.7% for China. The EU and China were again perceived to be at par (4.6 with 58.0% positive vote for China and 4.5 with 65.6% positive vote for the EU) on facilitating market access to products from Africa. The negative vote for the EU was more at 34.4% compared to only 28.6% for China. The tying or closeness of the average scores reinforces the fact that China is gaining ground in Africa and closing the gap on this perception index of market access at a high rate.

Beating China by a shy 16.8% difference, the EU's 4.6 overall score and China's 3.9 were neck-to-neck on the openness of their trade agreement negotiations with Africa, showing **that China is keen on openness of trade agreement negotiations with Africa as Europe.** The disaggregated scores gave a positive vote of 61.3% to the EU and 44.5% to China. The negative scores amounted to 26.1% for the EU and 43.6% for China.

### Intra-Africa Trade and Investments

On championing intra-African trade, China with 50.4% did not rank far from the EU at 55.8%. This demonstrates that China is rated favourably in Africa on intra-African trade. However, on the negative side China was rated at 34.8% against 28.8% for the EU. Again, the EU (4.7 with 64.7% positive vote and 23.7% negative vote) and China (4.1 with 50.3% positive vote and 38.1% negative vote) on offering better conditions for investments in Africa were perceived to be neck-to-neck. The imports from China impact the quest for industrialization in Africa than is the case for the imports from the EU. The positive vote for China was 59.9% against the EU's 54.9%. The negative vote was 22.5% for the EU, more than China's 21.0%.

### Reputation, Ethics and Transparency Corruption

With an overall score of 3.8, Chinese companies were perceived not to be shying away from investing in Africa due to reputational issues as much as European companies (4.4). The affirmative vote for the EU on shying away from Africa was 53.4%, more than China at 37.9%. The negative vote against shying away from Africa was 48.8% for China, against the EU's 34.7%.

### Corruption

From the primary data survey, the EU scored a mean of 3.5 with 32.5% positive vote and China scored 4.5 with 55.2% positive vote in terms of using some corrupt ways in Africa to achieve their goals. **This shows both China and EU are perceived to use corruption, China to a larger degree than Europe.** The negative vote was 53.4% for the EU and 29.7% for China.

Corruption perception indices have been in favour of the EU in terms of the region's dealings on the continent, but this study is proving otherwise. Transparency International's new Global Corruption Barometer – EU 2021 that surveyed over 40,000 people revealed that 62 per cent of the survey participants believed that government corruption is a big problem in the EU and it is getting worse. From conflicts of interest in awarding government contracts to undue influence by business on politics, from bribes to the use of personal connections when accessing public services, corruption takes many forms across the European Union (EU), trickling down to the EU's relationship with Africa. The EU has been complicit in illicit financial flows from Africa and tax avoidance practices. An estimated \$88.6 billion per year in revenue is lost by African countries. The EU position is "unilateral and discriminatory" and shifts the blame to developing countries, despite European countries such as Belgium, Germany, Spain and the UK being among the top-ten destinations for IFFs from Africa. A meagre 0.5% of the money from illicit capital flight is returned to the continent every year.

On transparency of economic cooperation agreements with African states, China was not rated much worse than the EU. This goes against the stylized fact that the EU insists on transparency much more than China does. Again, the EU's overall score of 4.7 (towards somewhat agreeable) was not so much better than China's 3.9 (almost neutral) on the terms and conditions of economic aid extended to African states.

The EU got 65.5% as the positive vote and China got 45.5%, beating China by only 20%. The negative vote was 26.4% for the EU and 44.6% for China.

**The perception index on addressing trade in counterfeit goods in Africa** was in favour of the EU at 5.0 with 69.9% positive vote against China's 3.7 with 38.6% positive vote – not a wide two-level difference as one would expect going by popular discourse. The negative result was 18.1% for the EU and 49.7% for China.

### Non-Interference Policy and Equal Partner Posture

China scored highly on granting Africa "Breathing Space". China scored a better average rating (4.9 with 64.4% positive and 20.9% negative vote) than the EU (4.3 with 50.1% positive and 35.5% negative vote) on non-interference in the internal state affairs in Africa. The EU scored a positive of 50.4% against China's 36.9% on treating African partners as equals. China received a disagreement of 53.5% against Europe's 40.1% on treating African partners as equals. China, at 3.7 with 36.3% positive vote, scored not too far from the EU's 4.8 with 65.2% positive vote on the capacity building and development of political parties in Africa. On this measure, the EU got 21.9% negative vote while China received 47.5%. The fact that China was close to neutrality on this perception rating is a clear confirmation of her non-interference philosophy with respect to political affairs against her rival, the EU, on governance matters.

### Investment Quality and Decision Making

**China acts quick in investment decisions while Europe is sluggish.** China makes quick decisions and turns in strategy as opposed to the EU. China scored a better average rating of 5.2 than the EU (4.2) on the speed of investment decisions, which has been the general observation. The positive vote for China was 73.4% and 48.7% for the EU. The negative vote was 13.1% for China and 36.8% for the EU.

On the speed of project completion in Africa, **China is more time conscious and reliable in expediting projects than the EU.** China scored higher (5.3) with 77.5% positive vote on the speed of project completion in Africa than the EU (4.7) with 64.5% positive vote. The negative vote was 25.0% for the EU and 14.3% for China on this metric. With organized military precision, China is known for speed and reliability.

The EU was however better rated than China on the **quality of investment projects in Africa** (5.4 for the EU with 87.9% positive and 12.1% negative vote: 4.4 for China with 58.1% positive vote and 33.4% negative vote).

### Private Sector and Small and Mediums Sized Enterprises

The EU and China were perceived to be neck-to-neck on facilitating MSMEs in Africa, with an overall mean of 4.9 for the EU and 4.1 for China. The EU got 70.9% as the positive vote and China got 52.7%. The negative vote was 20.7% for the EU and 39.3% for China. On supporting private sector growth in Africa, the EU had a mean score of 3.7 (average) with 38.7% positive and 61.3% negative vote while China had a mean of 3.0 (average) with 24.0% positive and 76.0% negative vote.

The average overall score for both means there is still a key gap in supporting private sector growth to be addressed by both the EU and China.

### Employment, Jobs and Labour Standards

China was close to the EU on the aspect of local involvement in project implementation (5.2 for the EU with 81.4% positive and 12.5% negative vote; 4.4 for China with 61.0% positive vote and 20.6% negative vote). China did not trail far behind on uniform application of labour standards metrics (4.8 for the EU with 66.5% positive and 12.1% negative vote; 4.0 for China with 46.4% positive vote and 36.4% negative vote).

China was, however, better rated on standards on child labour and human rights that designate Africa as a help zone that is not viable for investment. China's overall score was 4.0 (neutral) on this metric against the EU's 4.6 (tending to agree that the EU standards view Africa to be not viable for investment). The affirmative response for the EU on promoting such standards and views that are unfavourable to Africa was 58.5% against China's 44.0%. The opposing view was in favour of China (38.0%) as the EU had less (24.5%) votes opposing the thesis that they view Africa as an unviable investment zone due to child labour and human rights.

### Natural Resource Exploitation and Environmental Standards

On exploitation of natural resources to benefit local communities and host countries, China was again catching up with the EU on relative performance. The mean score of the EU was 4.1, a neutral mean score not very far from China's somewhat disagreeable average rating (3.4). The generally positive vote for the EU on this question was 52.8% of the respondents against 37.2% for China. The negative vote against the EU on the same metric was 40.5% of the respondents, not very far from China's 56.1% score. It is noteworthy however, that the effects of "resource curse" are still prevalent where European firms are involved, hence the need for the EU to improve substantially on this score. On environmental standards and protocols, the scores were 5.3 for the EU with 79.8% positive and 12.4% negative vote; and 3.9 for China with 45.3% positive vote and 45.1% negative vote.

### Climate Change Challenges

**China is hot on the heels of EU on Climate change consciousness in development assistance to Africa.** The EU scored an overall of 5.2 and China scored 3.9 on climate change consciousness in development assistance to Africa, giving her a margin of 31.4% over China. On the details, 75.1% of the vote was positive for the EU against 43.7% for China while the negative vote was 17.0% for the EU and 45.9% for China. Going by these metrics, China is well on track to closing in on the EU in climate change consciousness.

### Food Security

On the promotion of food and nutrition security in Africa, the EU received a positive score of 79.9% against China's 46.2%. Some 42.4% however disagreed on the side of China compared to 13.2% on the side of Europe.

### Political and Long-Term Strategic Cooperation

**China is closing in on the EU on long-termism.** Long-termism as an engagement strategy with Africa is no longer a reserve for Europe as China is fast closing the gap. Beijing views African countries as occupying a central position in its efforts to increase China's global influence, revise the international order, gain preferential access to Africa's natural resources, open markets for Chinese exports, and enlist African support for Chinese diplomatic priorities. The primary data analysis showed that long-termism is no longer a reserve for the EU (5.2), seeing that China (4.8) was not left far behind in exercising a long-term strategy for achieving goals in Africa. The positive vote for the EU on engaging a long-term strategy was 76.5% and China received 64.8%. The lower negative votes were 13.2% for the EU and 24.2% for China.

### Co-operation on Migration Issues

The weighted analysis of primary data placed the EU at snail's pace ahead of China as a collaborator with Africa on migration. China, again, scored an impressive 3.9 against the EU's 4.9. The vote was 68.2% positive for the EU and 39.9% for China, a 28.3% difference. The negative vote for the EU was 21.2% and for China was 43.4%.

### Gender and Human Rights

While the EU was rated positively on gender and human rights aspects, it should be noted that China is closing in on the EU. The EU was rated favourably at 85.1% against China's 40.2% on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the development agenda in Africa. A paltry 8.03% vote negated this for the EU and 44.9% for China. On human rights advocacy, the EU received a positive vote of 91.1% against China's 44.1%. China received a negative score of 55.9% against the EU's 8.73% as performing poorly on human rights advocacy.

### Public Health and Management of Pandemics

**China closing in on the EU on Health Diplomacy in Africa.** The EU's record on medical assistance in Africa was a mean rating of 5.6 against China's close score (4.6). The positive vote was 86.6% for the EU and 61.3% for China, while the negative vote was 8.5% for the EU and 29.7% for China. This is an indication that China is increasingly becoming a key actor in health diplomacy, particularly in Africa, despite the little attention being given to the evolution of Chinese health assistance to African states.

### State-led Investments

Surprisingly, the EU's 78.2% score was rated at par with China's 77.7% on the preference to engage directly with the state when negotiating and executing investment projects. The negative scores were at par also at 12.3% for both parties. Again, the EU and China were both perceived to be at par (5.3 – somewhat agreeable) on preferring their own state-owned companies when executing projects in Africa.

### International Currency

On the preference of the main currency of trade with Africa, the EU scored 4.9 overall on using the Euro and China scored 4.0 on using the Yuan as the main trading currency in Africa for each of them, respectively. The EU received 66.7% as

the positive vote and China scored 41.8%, with 23.6% negative vote for the EU and 41.0% for China. The EU, therefore, is seen in the light of being more inclined towards the Euro as the main trade currency with Africa while China gravitates towards the Yuan as the main trade currency with Africa. **China's Yuan could eventually develop into a reputable reserve currency in Africa.**

### Popular Arts Exchanges and African Indigenous Knowledge

The EU's overall score was 4.6 (towards somewhat agreeable) and China scored 3.7 (towards neutral) on supporting the conservation of African indigenous knowledge. The vote basket was divided with 61.5% being positive for the EU on conserving African indigenous knowledge against China's 37.8%. The negative vote against the EU was 26.4% and for China was 46.6%. On the popularity of artistic exchanges in Africa, China emerged with a fair score of 3.6, not very far from the EU's 5.1. The positive vote for the EU on this metric was 73.1% against China's 36.4%. On the negative vote, the EU attracted 18.3% and China 53.2%.

### Security and Digital Surveillance

The EU marine and sea power in Africa was rated as more beneficial to African countries at 50.5% compared to China's 34.9%. On the negative side, China scored 39.8% against the EU 25.7%. Both China and the EU were rated at par and at a high level of agreement (4.8 for the EU with 61.1% positive vote and 4.9 for China with 61.5% positive vote) to the statement that they are leading in digital surveillance in Africa. The negative vote for the EU was 18.9% and for China was 17.8%. In the era of increasing digitalization and surveillance capitalism, the EU needs to assure African states about security in digital spaces to win trust.

**From the synthesis of findings, the following perceptions and implications arose from the study:**

- I.** China is widening the gap on the EU on efficiency in decision-making and timely completion of projects.
- II.** China's tangible projects will continue to endear it to Africa more than the mostly abstract deliverables of the EU. On infrastructure development in Africa, China scores more than 20% above the EU.
- III.** **China appears to be on the way to closing the gap and overtaking the EU on most of the aspects of partnership with Africa**, the most evident being supporting private sector growth, intra-Africa trade and investments, economic cooperation, and long-term strategic co-operation.
- IV.** African leaders will be viewing both the EU and China as **complicit actors in entangling Africa in debt** although it is perceived that China at 66.4% rating traps Africa into debt more than the EU at 58.9%.
- V.** On security cooperation, both the EU and China snoop on Africa. The EU and China are at par on digital surveillance.
- VI.** Africa is conscious that both China and the EU use some corruption as a tool in their engagement with African states.
- VII.** China is seen as a peer allowing Africa to breathe through non-interference in Africa's internal state affairs.
- VIII.** The EU, like China, still prefer to engage directly with the state when negotiating and executing investment projects – a government to government engagement mode in investment promotion.

# 4. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

## 4.1 Conclusions

The EU may have over-rated some of the performance measures, kind of basking in its historical legacy in Africa. China scores much better than the EU on fewer but the weightiest centres of gravity for Africa's priority needs – physical infrastructure, speedy results, and non-interference in internal (political) affairs. China is thus headed towards closing the gap on the EU on most of the aspects of its engagement with Africa.

The infrastructure race and mineral-driven future of digital transformation both position China favourably in the unfolding era of Industry 4.0. The EU prides itself in a longer history with Africa, traceable to the colonial times. The neck-to-neck race with China, however, portends the likelihood of China relegating the pioneering leadership of the EU to the backseat of basking in former glory. A latecomer, China perfects the dexterity of improving on existing innovations to eventually take the lead.

The EU has a perceived formidable competitor in Africa, and should therefore not sit pretty, but take proactive measures if it must maintain and attain a positive footing in Africa. Streamlining decision-making processes within the multi-nation EU bloc for an enhanced systems approach is key to the success of a new engagement strategy with the impatient Africa, which is embracing China as a

friendly peer as opposed to the strict metaphorical parent that is the older European civilization. The European software-leaning values of democracy, freedom, human rights, and the rule of law seem to be a distant echo that is losing out in the competition for appeasing Africa's immediate and most pressing needs.

The silent but action-oriented path China treads is a winning salvo that can firmly challenge the EU's eloquence and flamboyant rhetoric with one silencing counter-narrative: **For China, it is easier done than said. For Europe, it is easier said than done.** Countering this plausible narrative gaining ground is a major challenge for the EU that demands an urgent change of policy and strategy on the part of the EU.

## 4.2 Policy Recommendations

From this study arose the following policy recommendations.

### **The European Union should overcome its paternalistic mindset and adopt strategic partnership posture in its Grand Strategy towards Africa**

China has been perceived to be keen on long term engagements with Africa, as demonstrated by its massive accordances of scholarship programmes to Africans and the infrastructure race. It is in the EU's interests to proactively disrupt the

China surge by first abandoning its old age paternalistic and romantic approach to Africa as a destination for "help" to one that offers business and greater opportunities. Second, by opening up its engagement with the continent through heavy investments, finance and technology.

### **Foreign policy and diplomatic re-calibration by all the actors to align with the emerging new multiple and equally influential players in Africa**

Africa now has multiple influencers and distributed geopolitical centres of gravity to choose from. The EU can no longer enjoy a monopoly of attractiveness to African states. Policies that take cognizance of this new reality in the spirit of competition for the common good on matters of environment and climate change need to be urgently formulated and implemented.

### **Re-examine reasons why the European Union is slower and outpaced by China in its engagements with Africa**

The European Union needs to retool its systems and values led engagements to improve its competitiveness against the Chinese state led system.

### **Promote development of indigenous African Private Sector so as to make the perception of the European Union Interference to be Postive**

The better score of the EU on promoting arts and cultural exchange is a key vantage position from which to influence a win-win co-operation with Africa without compromising indigenous values. There is need to build a strong relationship between the EU and Africa in the arts and culture. In addition, the EU should support Africa's private sector/locally-owned enterprises/SMEs. The EU should allow African companies more market in Europe and guarantee Africa a larger share of the value chain when it comes to processing its products. The game changer would be for the EU to aid Africa in taking greater control of its value chains through investment through private sector in value addition on the continent.

### **Develop a EU-Africa digital surveillance security cooperation for purposes of transparent big data mining framework**

The EU needs to urgently build upon its better score on transparency and exploit the opportunities of innovation and leapfrogging inherent in the new wave of digital transformation and big data, which Africa urgently needs to accelerate development. In the era of increasing digitalization and surveillance capitalism, the EU needs to assure African states about security in digital spaces and data mining to win trust.

