

# TOWARDS TRILATERAL COOPERATION

## EU and China in Africa: partners or rivals?



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## Abstract

As the new European Commission took its seat in the executive position of the EU in December 2019, one of the flagship announcements was a new and more ambitious comprehensive strategic partnership with Africa. The EU acknowledges the rise of the multipolar world system where emerging donors like China have increasingly accelerated relations with Africa, particularly in trade. This thesis applies the theory of neoliberal institutionalism through the qualitative research method of content analysis in examining to what extent the EU's proposed comprehensive strategic partnership with Africa has been affected by China's engagement in Africa.

Six key EU documents related to EU-Africa relations, EU-China relations, and EU-China-Africa trilateral cooperation have been used as primary sources of data in order to elucidate how neoliberal institutionalist notions such as cooperation, complex interdependence, absolute gains, the important role of institutions, and the international regime, can be used to explain to what extent the EU has adjusted its policies towards Africa and China for the interest of all.

A historical background with a development policy focus describes and explains how the China-Africa, EU-Africa and EU-China relations have evolved to culminate in a March 2020 Communication from the European Commission on the new strategic partnership with Africa. China and African states share a connection through their status as developing countries, a status that is being challenged by the EU as pertains to China. The EU and Africa share a history of a traditional donor-recipient relationship, in particular because of the colonial ties between Africa and some EU member states. The EU and China have over the years, since diplomatic ties were established, focussed on the benefits of trade with each other. In the multipolar world system of today, China's rising global influence needs to be addressed by the EU, and it does so by avoiding conflict at all cost through cooperation and economic interdependence.

The conclusion is that the EU has realised that in order to strengthen its cooperation with Africa it must adjust its policies so as to align them more with African needs that have been met successfully by China. The best way in which the EU can ensure that its interests are secured with regards to both Africa and China is to attempt to formalise a relationship of trilateral cooperation between these three actors, in similar ways in which it already has a regular dialogue through multiple channels with African and Chinese leaders respectively.

**Keywords:** EU, China, Africa, neoliberal institutionalism, development policy, foreign policy, trilateral cooperation

## List of abbreviations

<b>ACP</b>	African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>CIDCA</b>	China International Development Cooperation Agency
<b>DAC</b>	Development Assistance Committee (of the OECD)
<b>EEAS</b>	European External Action Service
<b>EEC</b>	European Economic Community
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FOCAC</b>	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
<b>GATT</b>	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>JAES</b>	Joint Africa-EU Strategy
<b>NSC</b>	North-South Cooperation
<b>OAU</b>	Organisation of African Unity
<b>OCT</b>	Overseas Countries and Territories
<b>ODA</b>	Official Development Assistance
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PRC</b>	People's Republic of China
<b>ROC</b>	Republic of China, Taiwan
<b>SSC</b>	South-South Cooperation
<b>TDC</b>	Trilateral Development Cooperation
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization

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# 1 Introduction

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China is, simultaneously, in different policy areas, a cooperation partner with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives, a negotiating partner with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance. (European Commission & EEAS, 2019, p. 1)

Ever since China's<sup>1</sup> opening to the Western world and its financial markets in 1978, the country has experienced massive growth and has consequently managed to expand its global influence. However, China has had a foreign aid policy since the early 1950s, and during this period there was a sense of solidarity between China and the rest of the developing countries that had recently become independent in that they would stand up against Western imperialism and colonialism (M. Huang & Ren, 2012, p. 76). One of the milestones in China's development policy towards Africa was the former Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai's eight principles for Chinese foreign aid. These were proposed during the Premier's visits to Africa in 1963-1964 and set out guidelines that are still very much relevant to how China conducts its foreign aid today. Particularly the principle known as "no strings attached" has garnered the attention of various Western scholars and other professionals, especially when viewed in contrast to the European Union's (EU) development policies towards Africa (Brautigam, 2010; Condon, 2012; Grimm & Hackenesch, 2016; X. Li, 2018; Wasserman, 2013). More importantly, in 2006, the first White Paper on a formalised Africa Policy was published by the Chinese government, marking an intensification of cooperation between China and Africa, as well as an institutionalisation of relations (Wu, 2012, p. 106).

The EU's development policies towards Africa have, on the contrary, been of a more traditional donor-recipient nature, many times with political conditionalities on, for example, democracy, human rights and the rule of law (Berkowitz, Catalina Rubianes, & Pieńkowski, 2018, pp. 11–13; Hackenesch, 2019; Moe Fejerskov, 2013, p. 42). Historically the EU's relations with Africa were initially established with former (mainly) French and Belgian colonies, slowly progressing from a typical paternalistic donor-recipient relationship to a partnership on equal terms (Babarinde, 2019). However, the EU has been criticised for not managing to deliver in practice on its promises to Africa in that it "often struggles to transcend its status as a donor and be seen as a real geopolitical actor" (Teevan & Sherriff, 2019, p. 3). Whereas the EU has traditionally applied aid conditionality, and not always aligned with the main priorities of the recipient country and following the new European Commission's political emphasis on

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth, for clarity's sake, whenever the name China is used in this thesis, it is explicitly referring to the People's Republic of China (PRC).

establishing a new comprehensive strategy for Africa, it begs the question of whether this new focus could be a counterreaction to Chinese expansions.

This thesis will analyse whether the EU's proposed comprehensive strategic partnership with Africa is a response to China's increased presence in Africa. The analysis of this element will be conducted through content analysis of several official documents as published by the EU, related to EU-Africa relations, EU-China relations, and EU-Africa-China trilateral cooperation (European Commission, 2008, 2018; European Commission & EEAS, 2016, 2019, 2020; European Union & Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2013). These documents will be analysed in order to illuminate whether the EU has formulated the newly proposed comprehensive strategy for Africa as a reaction to China's increased presence and engagement in Africa.

In order to analyse whether the EU as a supranational institution - that abides by the rules and norms that are stipulated by the current international regime (UN, WTO, World Bank, etc.) - has formulated its proposed new strategy for Africa as a reaction to China's engagement on the continent, the theory of neoliberal institutionalism will be applied. It can therefore be argued that the EU is more than an institution through which state actors can promote their national interests. Rather, the EU is an actor in the international arena that purports to maintain and promulgate the rules and norms of the international regime. As both the EU and China are dependent on international trade with each other as well as with Africa, a pattern of interdependence arises, as stipulated by neoliberal institutionalists. In addition, through the institutionalised frameworks of strategic partnerships representing a materialisation of cooperation and interdependence, the EU and China have formally acknowledged the mutual need for cooperation in an emerging multipolar world (Christiansen, 2016, p. 30).

The question is whether the EU is attempting to adapt its development- and foreign policy towards China and Africa by straying away from traditional donor strategies and instead focusing more on economic partnerships, in particular a "comprehensive strategy with Africa" (European Commission, 2020b). According to neoliberal institutionalism, adaptation and adjustment of policies is part of the process and patterns of cooperation. This thesis sets out to argue that despite the tendencies to define the relationship between the EU and China as one of rivalry and competition, it is cooperation with each other and with Africa that will lead to absolute gains in the long run. Conclusively, the abovementioned reflections led to the formulation of this thesis' main research question:

***To what extent has the EU's proposed comprehensive strategic partnership with Africa been affected by China's engagement in Africa?***

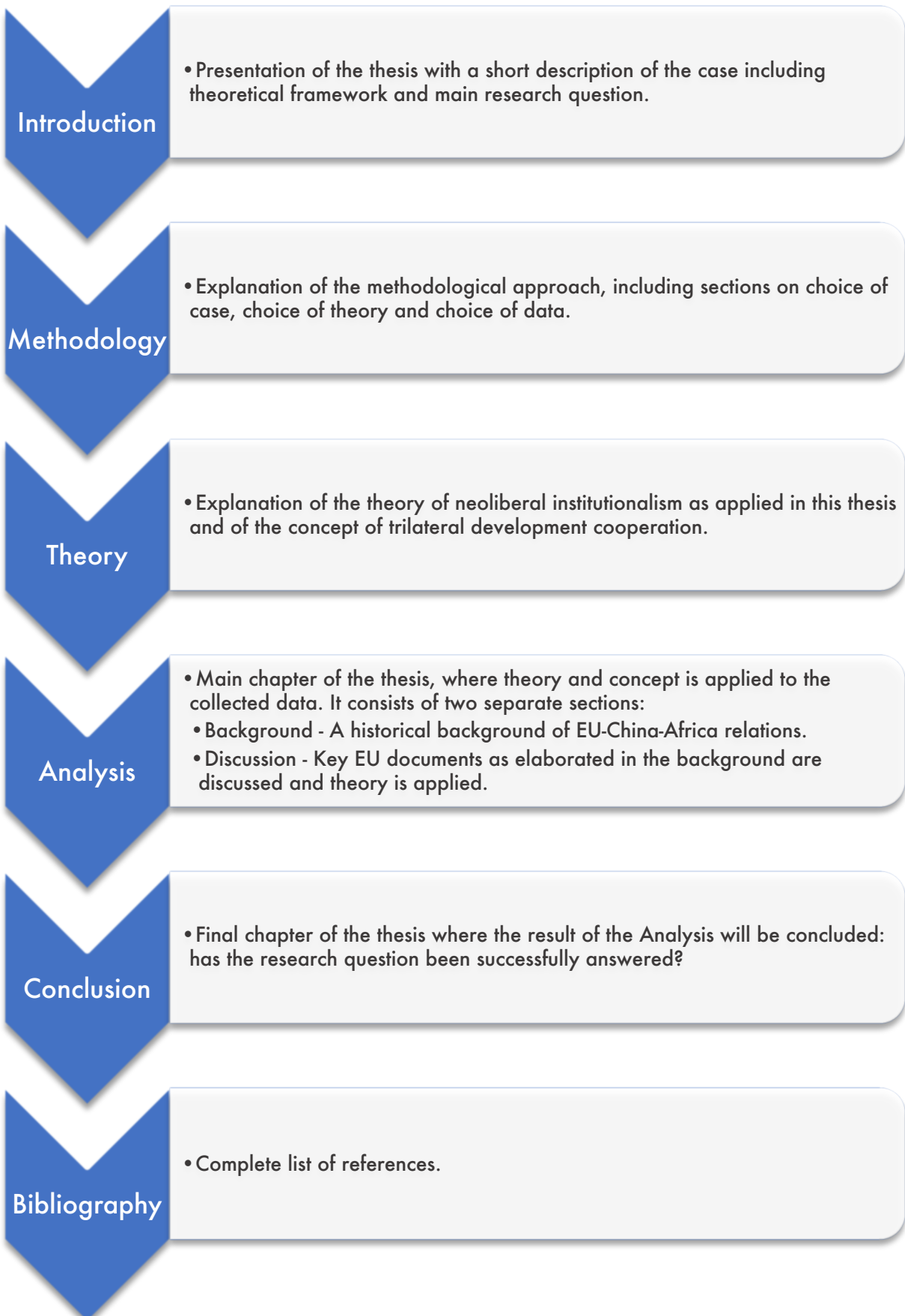
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## 2 Methodology

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This chapter is dedicated to explaining the methodological approach for this thesis. It will start off with a general outline of this thesis, sketching out all its chapters with short descriptions of the contents. Following that there will be a section that will explain the choice of topic: whether the EU's heightened ambitions in its strategic partnership with Africa is a result of China's actions in Africa, and how this is relevant for research purposes. This is followed by a section on the case study as the chosen research method for this thesis. Next is a section that explains why the choice of neoliberal institutionalism as a theoretical framework has been applied in the analysis and why the concept of trilateral development cooperation (TDC) has been included, including a subsection on rival theories and criticism. The following section outlines the choice of data and the method of analysis of the data. The chapter concludes with a section on the limitations of this thesis.

## 2.1 Thesis outline



## 2.2 Choice of topic

During the autumn of 2019, the author of this thesis conducted an internship with the development cooperation section at the Permanent Representation of Sweden to the EU in Brussels, Belgium, which culminated in a project report that was submitted to Aalborg University. After discussions with officials at the Representation and listening to various Council (of the EU) meetings, the author perceived that the topic of Africa was a constant hot topic on the agenda. Similarly, China's activities in development cooperation – particularly in Africa – awoke much curiosity. In addition, during the internship period, a new College of Commissioners was elected, and the subject of a strategic partnership between the EU and Africa was prevalent in many of the European Commission's new strategies. However, due to limitations on time, length and scope, the resulting project report from the internship focused on a smaller piece of the puzzle, the Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs. This Alliance was speculated in news sources to be the EU's response to China's increased presence in Africa. The decision was then made to instead write the master's thesis on a topic that was to be related to the project report but with a wider scope.

As the EU and its member states promote multilateralism and free trade, Africa is now considered to be of utmost importance, as evidenced by the new Commission's focus on a comprehensive strategy for Africa. Furthermore, the EU prides itself as being the biggest provider of official development assistance (ODA) in accordance with OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC), but what happens when China is increasing its development activities and funding in Africa – one of the EUEU's historically most important partners – without being a member of the DAC and thus is not obliged by the committee's regulations to provide exact numbers of its aid delivery? Some observers have accused China's development policy of being opaque and unclear, yet African nations continue to enter into agreements with China in order to initiate development projects and such.

In March 2019 the EU published a strategic document on EU-China relations where China was labelled a “systemic rival”, but also a partner and a competitor. As a new College of Commissioners took its seat in the European Commission in December 2019, one of the main themes was the proposal of a new comprehensive strategic partnership with Africa, which has been deemed by some observers as a reaction to China's increased influence and presence in Africa. This motivated the author to attempt to elucidate what prompted the EU to be so plain-spoken as to call China a rival? Considering that several EU member states have formed closer bilateral ties with China, such as the 17+1 Initiative, and that China's development assistance is

increasing year by year to Africa, is the EU afraid of China becoming a dominant force in areas that the EU has historically been leading?

The topic of this thesis is relevant for research purposes because it addresses several issues that are pertinent for current affairs: the multipolar world system, emerging donors, the relationship between the EU and Africa, the relationship between the EU and China, and how the liberal values of the current international regime are being both met and challenged by China.

## **2.3 Research method**

The research method chosen for the subject of this thesis is that of a case study where the EU is the main unit of analysis, and Africa and China serve as subunits or secondary units of analysis. A case study is generally recommended to focus on current events, hence why the analysis of this thesis is concentrated on a timeframe that begins with a 2008 Communication from the European Commission where it proposes the notion of trilateral cooperation with Africa and China, and concludes with a Communication from the European Commission and the EEAS on a proposed comprehensive strategic partnership with Africa, officially published in March 2020.

### **2.3.1 Case study design**

According to Robert K. Yin (Yin, 2014, Chapter 2), there are usually five elements to be addressed in a case study research design: “the case study’s questions; its propositions; its units of analysis; the logic linking the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the findings”.

As to this case study’s questions, the main research question is in the form of “*to what extent* the EU’s proposed new strategy for Africa has been affected by China’s engagement in Africa” rather than “*how*”, as “how” would have assumed that the EU’s strategy for Africa being affected by China’s engagement in Africa is a fact, which is not necessarily the case. Rather, to what extent it has been affected is more prudent so as to not draw any preconceived conclusions as the proposed new strategy bears such a novelty that it has not yet been sufficiently scrutinised by observers.

The propositions of the thesis are then applied according to the research question or questions. With the theory of neoliberal institutionalism where cooperation is one of the main features, this thesis’ propositions are that the EU as a multilateral actor finds itself in an emerging multipolar international system, where cooperation in the form of partnerships is the main strategy in order to ensure its prosperity. Furthermore, with the notion that actors can then be motivated to adjust their respective policy framework, the EU has watched China’s engagement in Africa

with great attention and has evolved its development policy to merge with its foreign policy, similarly to China's development policy that is essentially an elongation of its foreign policy.

The main unit of analysis is the EU's foreign- and development policy in the specific context of its increased focus on Africa as a strategic partner. China and Africa are subunits of analysis in how the two actors' cooperation might have affected the EU's foreign- and development policy towards Africa in its newest proposal for a comprehensive strategic partnership.

Linking the data – the key EU documents – used in this thesis with its propositions is done by setting a timeframe that mainly covers the period between 2008 and 2020. In addition, this is also done by matching the patterns in the EU's relations with China and Africa with the patterns of cooperation in the theory of neoliberal institutionalism.

Finally, the criteria for interpreting the findings is conducted by using, as aforementioned, neoliberal institutionalism as well as partly the concept of trilateral development cooperation. The latter is particularly complex as it specifically refers to trilateral cooperation in the field of international development between two actors in the global South and one actor in the global North. The EU uses the concept of trilateral cooperation in referring to several areas, including development, but also peace and security, and trilateral cooperation can also entail multilateral cooperation between international organisations such as the EU, the UN and the AU. Rival theories should also be addressed so as to ascertain the validity and reliability of the study, and this will be done in the next section.

## 2.4 Choice of theory

The theoretical framework of neoliberal institutionalism was applied by consulting two major works, *After Hegemony* by Robert O. Keohane (1984) and *Power and Interdependence* by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye (2011). The context of this thesis is the EU's foreign- and development policy as potentially affected by the cooperation between China and Africa as well as the EU's desire for increased cooperation with both actors. The neoliberal institutionalist concepts of complex interdependence, patterns of cooperation, the role of power in interdependence, and international regimes are applied in the case of the EU vis-à-vis China and Africa respectively. Sensitivity and vulnerability as the two components of the role of power in interdependence is useful to explain the asymmetrical interdependence between the EU and Africa as well as between China and Africa. This is of use when examining the proposed new comprehensive strategic partnership between the EU and Africa. Moreover, neoliberal institutionalism can address globalization and a multipolar world order with emerging actors,

which is applied particularly in the policy framework of the EU vis-à-vis China. The trilateral nature of the potential cooperation between the EU, China and Africa is not specifically referred to in neoliberal institutionalism, therefore the concept of TDC as elaborated by A.K. Stahl (2018) was chosen as a support for the theoretical analysis. Stahl's work reflects on a changing global political climate where multipolarity is on the rise along with emerging development actors such as China, and the EU might find itself in a dilemma of whether to continue with its traditional donor strategies or whether to adjust its policies so as to align more with Africa's objectives, possibly also with China.

In addition, applying neoliberal or liberal institutionalism to the analysis of the EU's relationship with China as well as the potential trilateral cooperation between the EU, China and Africa has been done by other scholars such as the aforementioned Stahl, who acknowledges that neoliberal institutionalism can be applied in analysing the EU's perspective in the EU-China-Africa trilateral development cooperation concept. Bas Hooijmaaijers (2018) applies institutionalism in his analysis of the trilateral cooperation possibility in the context of China as an emerging actor in Africa and how the EU responds to this. Similarly, Thomas Christiansen (2016) applies the liberal institutionalist perspective on China-EU relations by acknowledging the two actors' mutual dependence on trade and their common objective for global stability in order to facilitate the mutual benefits in their relations.

### **2.4.1 Rival theories and criticism**

This subsection will address rival theories that could have been applied in this thesis. It will also take on a more critical stance and address what the applied theory of neoliberal institutionalism may not have been able to confront. In the search for an appropriate theoretical framework, neorealism and world-systems theory were considered. It is also methodological practice to address rival theories to the chosen theory.

Neorealism as a theoretical framework when analysing the interests and objectives of China and the EU would have examined the influence of the most powerful member states of the EU and China in policy-making, where security is the most important factor. According to Kenneth Waltz, the biggest threat to the prosperity of a state is the prospect of violence in the world system that is inherently anarchic (Waltz, 1979, p. 102). Therefore, with this constant threat, states prefer not to resort to dependence on other states. According to neorealism, great powers are the main actors - with an emphasis on the great powers being states – and the goal is to achieve hegemonic power (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 22). This theory could have been applied if the main unit of analysis had been China and the intention was to elucidate what the goal of China is in its

engagement in Africa. Furthermore, considering the fact that China is not viewed as a global military power that can constitute a security threat to other states, neorealism could not have been relevant to this research. While both neoliberal institutionalism and neorealism address the structure of the international system, the answers are on opposite sides, where neorealists consider the system to be in a perpetual state of anarchy where security by strength of military power is the most important feature, whereas neoliberal institutionalism sees a system structure based on rules and norms where economic gains and mutual benefits are most essential. In addition, the purpose of this thesis is to pursue an answer to whether the EU's foreign- and development policy has been affected by China's increased activities in Africa. Thus, neoliberal institutionalism proved to be more relevant as a theoretical framework as it also explains how actors adapt and adjust policies in order to attempt to reach a state of cooperation.

World-systems theory, as primarily outlined by Immanuel Wallerstein, and possibly also dependency theory, could have been applied, for it deals with the rise and fall of world systems (Hobden & Wyn Jones, 2014, pp. 145–146). In order to apply world-systems theory, the thesis could have focused on China and Africa as emerging powers in the periphery and the semi-periphery in a possibly declining world system that may or may not be in transition, while core actors like the EU and the US drain the resources from the periphery and semi-periphery. Likewise, it could be argued that China as a semi-periphery drains the resources from Africa as a periphery. However, once again, because the EU is the main unit of analysis and the thesis' point of reference is that the world is increasingly globalized, Wallerstein's theory could have proven inappropriate, primarily for the fact that Wallerstein considers globalization as something that was imposed by the core powers (Wallerstein, 2003, p. 45). Conclusively, neoliberal institutionalism was considered a better choice as it also addresses the processes of globalization where institutions such as the EU play an important part (Lamy, 2014, p. 132).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the trilateral relationship between the EU, China and Africa is not explicitly addressed and explained in Keohane's and Nye's works. The neorealist concept of the strategic triangle could possibly better explain how each actor influences the other in order to gain a better position (Ross & Ellison, 1993). However, as this concept builds on a conflictual state of affairs where one actor's security can be affected by conflict between the other two, it might not be able to explain how the EU's newly proposed comprehensive strategic partnership with Africa might have been affected by China's emergence in Africa. None of the three actors are in conflict with each other, on the contrary they are all eager to maintain dialogue and cooperation.

## 2.5 Choice of data and method of analysis

This thesis applies a qualitative research method by the use of content analysis. The main data that is to be analysed consists of six official policy papers published by the EU – these are primary sources – from which one is of particular importance to the research question, *Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa*, which is the March 2020 official publication of the new European Commission’s proposed new comprehensive strategic partnership with Africa as elaborated during the commissioner hearings in October 2019 and in the new European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen’s mission letters to her elected commissioners in December 2019. There is only one official policy paper available by the EU that concerns trilateral cooperation between the EU, China and Africa, and it was published in 2008. The primary sources can be divided into three categories: 1) EU-Africa-China relations, 2) EU-China relations, and 3) EU-Africa relations.

See graphic of key EU documents below, with the document of most importance to the research question in bold:



The element focussing on the EU’s foreign policy of comprehensive strategic partnership is in particular of interest as the aim of this thesis is to attempt to analyse the EU’s newly proposed comprehensive strategic partnership with Africa and how this may or may not have been affected by China as an emerging actor in Africa. Secondary sources used for this thesis have been works on the history of the relations between China and Africa, the EU and Africa, and finally the EU and China. These served as support documents that explained the political and historical context that led up to the publication of the six key EU documents that were used in the analysis. In

addition, news sources and think tanks have also been used to provide contemporary discussion on the EU's newly proposed comprehensive strategic partnership with Africa; China's "no strings attached" policy in Africa; and the so-called rivalry or competition between the EU and China.

By applying the theory of neoliberal institutionalism with key concepts such as complex interdependence, cooperation, international regime and the role of institutions, the content of the six key EU documents will be analysed from the EU's perspective as the EU is the main unit of analysis. These concepts will explain to what extent the EU's new comprehensive strategy with Africa has been affected by China's emergence in Africa, with a focus on development cooperation.

The choice of the six key EU documents was due to the fact that the newest official EU publication on trilateral cooperation between the EU, China and Africa is from 2008, so there has been some time that has passed since the EU so candidly expressed a desire for a trilateral cooperation with China and Africa. The main EU document is the March 2020 *Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa* that is essentially the culmination of more than sixty years of interdependence between the EU and Africa. Furthermore, in order to analyse the current EU-China-Africa relations it is necessary to provide a historical context. The data that draws from the secondary sources used for the historical context are interlinked with the six key EU documents as these documents are the result of these historical relationships, thus the historical background has been incorporated within the Analysis chapter that has consequently been divided into two sections: Historical background and Discussion. The EU documents are important features of both the Historical background section as well as the Discussion section.

## 2.6 Limitations

One of the main limitations of this study has been the fact that the newly proposed EU-Africa comprehensive strategic partnership is an on-going process; the official Communication from the European Commission and the EEAS was released as late as in March 2020. In addition, analysing whether the EU's policy framework towards Africa has been affected by China's increased influence in Africa entails a historical background so as to explain how the three actors reached this point, which could have produced a rather extensive and lengthy study. As it was necessary to examine several key EU documents, it proved rather difficult to centre on only one document for analysis, as these, for example, often referred to previously issued strategy papers. Thus, the scope and timeframe of this thesis was not easy to narrow down, as all three actors are of importance.

Another limitation, which can be linked to the abovementioned, is the case study design and the choice of theory. This thesis could have applied a comparative case study design, where

the EU, China, and Africa are all given equal attention in the analysis, but analysing all three actors' policy frameworks would have been very difficult, particularly considering the fact that the EU is rather unique in its formalised development policy, as compared to the African Union (AU), for example. While the AU is an organisation much alike the EU in objectives and constitution, there is not a similar legal foundation as in the EU's legal framework.

Finally, arriving at a generalisation is not necessarily the end goal of this thesis, as the EU is a rather unique entity in the international arena. One cannot state that the results of this research can apply to other supranational institutions such as, for example, the WTO, the World Bank, the AU, the UN. The EU has a special constitution in the balance between the member states' national sovereignty and the powers ascribed to the main institutions of the EU.

This chapter has explained the methodological procedures for this thesis, including a justification of the theoretical framework. The next chapter will therefore in more depth illuminate the theory of neoliberal institutionalism as well as the concept of trilateral development cooperation that have been applied in the analysis.

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## 3 Theory

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To explain the EU's newly proposed strategy for Africa and how its elaboration may or may not have been affected by China's policy and actions towards Africa, the theory of neoliberal institutionalism will be applied. The concept of trilateral development cooperation will describe what may or may not be attempted between the EU, China and Africa. This chapter will therefore in two sections outline the theory and concept applied in this thesis. A final section will explain how the theory of neoliberal institutionalism and the concept of TDC will be applied in practice in the case study of the EU's newly proposed comprehensive strategic partnership with Africa.

### 3.1 Theory: Neoliberal institutionalism

As the EU is the main unit of analysis, neoliberal institutionalism might help in describing the EU's trials and tribulations in dealing with China and Africa. What is more, neoliberal institutionalists purport that despite the US losing its hegemonic position in the world arena, liberal international regimes or international organizations, such as the IMF and the WTO, continue to shape the world order. Furthermore, the EU's comprehensive strategy for Africa is mainly based on ensuring an equal partnership, and the EU is a strong supporter of the continued work and existence of its African counterpart, the African Union.

The main notions of neoliberal institutionalism are the international regimes - norms and rules set by international organizations; interdependence; and cooperation. Interdependence in the international arena is concisely explained by Keohane and Nye as mutual dependence, meaning "situations characterised by reciprocal effects among countries or among actors in different countries" (Keohane & Nye, 2011, p. 7). Institutions as such form a vital part of neoliberal institutionalism and can offer an alternative to the traditional state-centred realist perspective in an increasingly globalized world where many actors – organizations, state and non-state – pertain to multilateralism. Furthermore, as the international arena can no longer be viewed as being ruled by a hegemonic power, neoliberal institutionalism demonstrates that states can deal with this change by cooperating with each other within the framework of international institutions (Burchill, 2005, p. 63). The EU as a supranational institution is in itself a concrete example of the cooperation between states while abiding by the rules and norms set down for them as members. The change in the international arena is, as aforementioned, a post-war world order where former hegemons have been gradually declining, while emerging actors such as China have begun to have a much bigger impact and role.

As opposed to various strands of realism that assume the main position that nation-states are at the core of the world order, and pure self-interest and conflict are inevitable, neoliberal institutionalism is a reaction to the post-war world order where several international organizations were established (UN, World Bank, IMF, EU, etc.) in order to maintain peace as well as global economic and political stability (Stein, 2008, p. 202). Neoliberal institutionalists thus argue that there is a variety of actors involved in policy-making in the global arena through transnationalism and complex interdependence (Lamy, 2014, p. 132).

According to Arthur A. Stein, particularly the EU is a frontrunner when it comes to embodying institutionalism in that it “transcend[s] [...] the anarchic state of nature in which realists presume states find themselves” (Stein, 2008, p. 203). However, it is also important to note that self-interest is not absent in the theory of neoliberal institutionalism. Cooperation between governments through international regimes is for the actors to fulfil their own objectives, but not without policy adjustments or policy coordination so as to adhere to the rules (Keohane, 1984, p. 63). Furthermore, interdependence always includes a cost to a certain degree for all actors involved, but one cannot say whether the cost of interdependence will be greater than the benefits the actors might enjoy from the relationship as this depends on “the values of the actors as well as on the nature of the relationship” (Keohane & Nye, 2011, p. 8).

Keohane and Nye argue that there is nothing guaranteeing that interdependence automatically implies mutual benefits for both parties, however interdependence will always, as abovementioned, include certain costs for both parties (p. 8 power and interdependence). Interdependence between states is affected by international regimes, in that international organizations set terms and rules that states have to abide by in various areas of cooperation, such as development cooperation (Keohane & Nye, 2011, p. 17). The EU is in a way an international regime in itself and the member states within it are directly affected by the rules and regulations of this supranational institution as well as by the relationship of interdependence between one another. When it comes to the EU vis-à-vis China and Africa, the EU is in a relationship of interdependence wherein it attempts to promote cooperation by adhering to the international regime that advocates for norms such as multilateralism, the rule of law and democracy.

In the relations between states and/or organizations, Keohane argues that there can be three different results in whether an actor adjusts its policies: cooperation, harmony, and discord (Keohane, 1984, p. 52). Harmony is essentially rather idealistic and not very prevalent in today’s international arena, in that “each actor’s policies (pursued without regard for the interest of others) are regarded by others as facilitating the attainment of their goals”. Cooperation, on the other hand, is often about bargaining and negotiating from both sides where the “actors adjust the

behaviour to the actual or anticipated preferences of others, through a process of policy coordination” (Keohane, 1984, p. 51). In essence, each party is willing to make adjustments to its own policies in order to attain a common objective. Finally, discord occurs when “each actor’s policies (pursued without regard for the interest of others) are regarded by others as hindering the attainment of their goals” and either no side is willing to compromise with their policies or they attempt to adjust their policies but the result is mutually incompatible. Ultimately, Keohane finds that relationships between actors in the international arena are generally either of a nature of cooperation or of discord.

Cooperation, or rather understanding patterns of cooperation, implies according to Keohane:

We need to examine actors’ expectations about future patterns of interaction, their assumptions about the proper nature of economic arrangements, and the kinds of political activities they regard as legitimate. That is, we need to analyse cooperation within the context of international institutions. [...] Each act of cooperation or discord affects the beliefs, rules, and practices that form the context for future actions. Each act must therefore be interpreted as embedded within a chain of such acts and their successive cognitive and institutional residues. (Keohane, 1984, p. 56)

International regimes describe the patterns of cooperation in the global arena and these, concisely put, consist of “principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures” that are mutually shared by a number of actors (Keohane, 1984, p. 59). Consequently, regimes, cooperation and interdependence are all interlinked in that there can be a common strategy set down by international institutions that should be followed by all the members. In addition, as opposed to neorealism, according to neoliberal institutionalism it is absolute gains, not relative gains, that is most important to the actors (Powell, 1991, p. 1303). Thus through cooperation, actors are interested in how they themselves can gain the most out of its relations with other actors, and is not concerned with whether other actors would gain more or less. In the end, it is the maximised mutual benefits that are essential for all actors involved in cooperation.

Following on the post-war state of the world where economic development and market liberalization became increasingly standard norms for the world order, as stipulated by the Bretton Woods system, in order to avoid conflict and instead promote cooperation with the result being sometimes an asymmetrical interdependence where there is not necessarily an equal share of sensitivity or vulnerability (Keohane & Nye, 2011, p. 10). This means that the notion of power is far from absent in the theory of neoliberal institutionalism. Keohane and Nye argue that the role of power in interdependence consists of sensitivity and vulnerability. Sensitivity interdependence implies to what degree an actor is able to change its policies and what the effects of these changes are – how costly these are. Vulnerability interdependence implies the above but with changes that are indeed costly.

Through the spectrum of neoliberal institutionalism, the international arena involves both state as well as non-state actors. Therefore, the nature of interdependence is much more complex than just state to state interaction; Keohane and Nye refer to it as complex interdependence and proclaim that it has three main characteristics: multiple channels, the absence of hierarchy among issues, and the minor role of military force (Keohane & Nye, 2011, pp. 20–24).

The interaction between actors in the global arena occurs via multiple channels beyond state boundaries. What is more, the actors are not only states but can also be actors from the private sector as well as international organisations. In the second half of the 20th century there has been an increase in linkage between state and non-state actors in both domestic and international policy contexts. Consequently, complex interdependence involves multiple channels of action where relations are interstate, transgovernmental, and transnational. In addition, because of the multiplicity of actors involved in policy issues the agenda has become much more diverse and does not only pertain to traditional issues such as military issues. The absence of hierarchy among issues implies that these often overlap and are dealt with by various actors in different areas. This can become problematic as it can lead to an increase in bureaucratic routines and a lack of coherence and consistency. Lastly, theorists of complex interdependence also argue that the role of military force and the use of coercive measures have decreased as actors find other tools to use in attaining their objectives. Many actors can fear that military force and coercive measures will damage relationships with other actors, but ultimately Keohane and Nye do not completely disregard the use of force. They acknowledge that in some extreme situations it can be the only course of action (2011, p. 24). Nevertheless, neoliberal institutionalism explains that one cannot view the current world from a one-dimensional perspective, hence why the notion of interdependence is indeed complex and there are many factors involved that decide the nature of the relationship.

It can be argued that Keohane and Nye predicted today's state of the world when they explained it as being different from that during wartime. In the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of *Power and Interdependence*, there is an added chapter on globalization and interdependence. The authors prefer to use the word “globalism” as it is “a condition [...] that can increase or decrease”. Globalism is thus explained as a condition of “networks of interdependence at multicontinental distances” that connects, for example, capital, people and goods across vast distances on a global scale (Keohane & Nye, 2011, p. 226). Furthermore, Keohane and Nye assert that there are several dimensions to globalism, of which political globalism could be the most pertinent for this thesis. As a subset of social globalism, political globalism refers to how policies and international regimes can be spread throughout the world.

The international regime under which the EU operates is the result of political globalism, wherein multilateralism, the rule of law, democracy and good governance (among others) are key rules and norms for actors to abide by. In addition, economic interdependence is a standard feature among actors, as the EU finds itself in a relationship of economic interdependence with China, for example.

### **3.2 Concept: Trilateral Development Cooperation (TDC)**

As neoliberal institutionalism does not explicitly explain the nature of trilateral cooperation, the concept of trilateral development cooperation might help to elucidate the nature of this relationship. Trilateral development cooperation (TDC) exists within the postulation that the international arena today finds itself in a context of multipolarity (Stahl, 2018, p. 91). This stems from the fact that the world is not considered to be bipolar or unipolar anymore, for the emergence of states like China, India, Brazil and South Africa have changed the political and economic playgrounds for Western nations that have traditionally held a more dominant presence in developing countries through development cooperation – so-called North-South Cooperation (NSC), meaning development cooperation between the global South and the global North. In order to describe TDC it is necessary to speak of the relations between the so-called developing countries. These aforementioned emerging nations have themselves been labelled as developing countries, but they have now built up enough financial muscle so as to be able to provide development aid to other developing countries (Stahl, 2018, p. 92). This development or technical cooperation between countries in the Global South is thus called South-South Cooperation (SSC) (UN News, 2019). For this reason, China is particularly of interest as the nation has experienced a rapid growth in the past 40 years since its opening up to the West and has established itself as currently one of the most globally powerful and influential nations. The global development community has therefore become much more complex and multifaceted with these new big players, possibly rendering terms such as the Global South or developing countries rather outdated, so instead terms such as emerging donors and SSC is more frequently used (Stahl, 2018, p. 93).

Stahl also argues that the origins of SSC were not only founded for economic reasons but also for political reasons, as demonstrated at the Bandung Conference in 1955 when countries from the Global South, including China, convened to “formulat[e] a common political agenda” as a consequence of the post-colonial state of the world (Stahl, 2018, p. 94). In addition, Stahl also argues that this seed that was planted more than sixty years ago would later result in the Western community – in the case of Stahl’s book and this thesis it particularly refers to the EU – waking

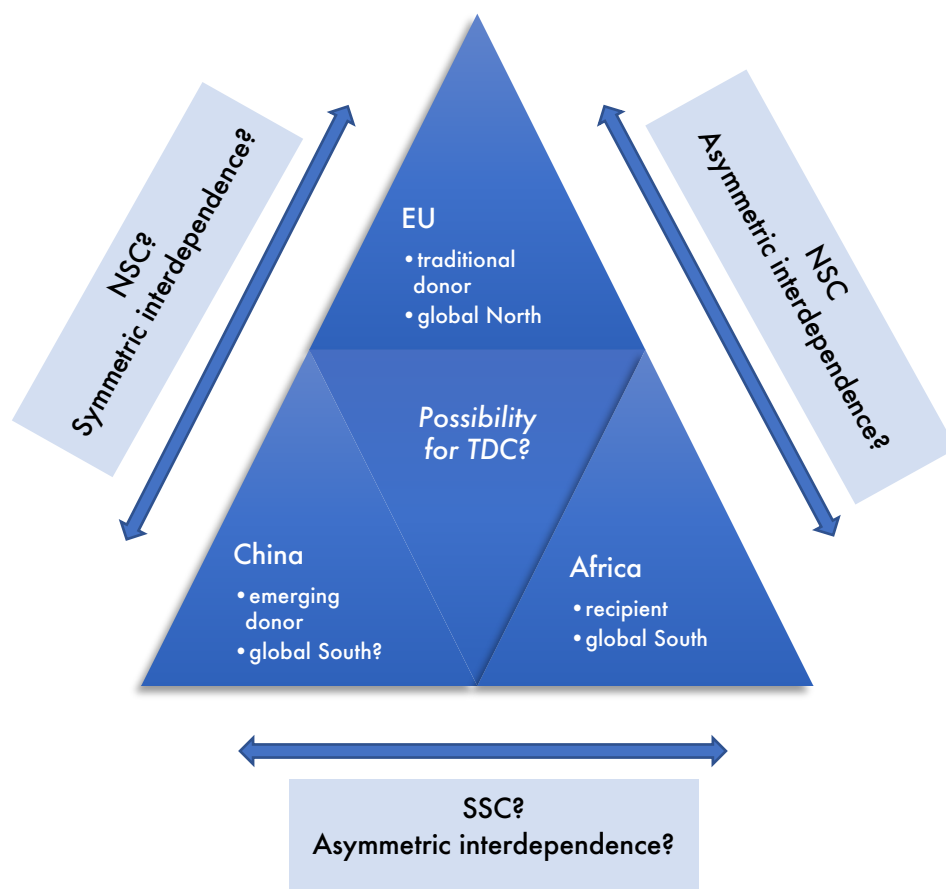
up to a changed world order that is possibly on the verge of becoming multipolar (Stahl, 2018, p. 3). Thus it is possible that TDC arises as the result of this changing world order, where two partners from the global South and one partner from the global North form a development partnership.

### **3.3 Theory and concept in practice**

The EU as an actor perfectly embodies the ideas of neoliberal institutionalism. It is itself the result of cooperation among actors with the main purpose to attain peace and stability through trade and cooperation. The EU conducts its bilateral relationships with other actors, mainly countries, through partnerships. These partnerships are the result of negotiation and compromise from both parties involved, culminating in a formalised outline on how to cooperate through policy dialogue so as to better align involved actors' policy frameworks. The EU can be argued to have been born through the realisation that interdependence and cooperation by finding common objectives will lead to benefits for all members involved. Similarly, the EU continues to act in a spirit of cooperation where its current foreign policy frameworks for both China and Africa are based on attempting to attain common objectives through regular dialogues. These common objectives are not altruistic in nature, for in essence they reflect these actors' own interests and how they together attempt to find more and more areas in which cooperation is possible. What can this lead to? If EU and Africa are interdependent partners, through the lens of neoliberal institutionalism it is implied that they are both better off in a partnership than without one. The same case can be made for the EU and China, where trade is already an important area in which the two actors' cooperation is vital as it can be argued that a relationship of interdependency has been established. Finally, because both the EU and China consider Africa more and more important to ascertain their own prosperity, and Africa could benefit from having two powerful actors investing in the continent through a process of negotiation so as to ascertain African countries' prosperity as well, why not take cooperation one step further through trilateral cooperation? Stahl's definition of trilateral development cooperation states that it is between two actors from the global South (or developing countries) and one actor from the global North (or a developed country). It can be argued whether China is still an actor of the global South or a developing country, considering its increased global activities and their impacts, as in the development community. However, regardless of China's status as a developing country or an actor of the global South, in development terms both the EU and China can be labelled as donors whereas Africa can be considered a recipient.

This calls into focus the neoliberal institutionalist explanation of power in interdependence, where sensitivity and vulnerability can explain the effects of policy coordination

and the ability of an actor to change policies in order to deal with an external factor that has an impact. This can also help to explain how asymmetrical interdependence can occur when one actor has more influence over the patterns of outcomes (Keohane & Nye, 2011, p. 10). The role of power can be analysed in Africa's dependence on the EU and China, resulting in an asymmetrical interdependence, where the EU and China, in a way, have the upper hand because asymmetric interdependence is a source of power as it provides one actor with influence.



However, asymmetric interdependence is not a goal to achieve, rather an issue to be addressed. The EU has been criticised for unilateral policy-making towards Africa without consulting its African counterparts, therefore the EU is adamant to implement its newly proposed comprehensive strategic partnership with Africa to achieve an equal partnership that is achieved through dialogue and negotiation between EU and African leaders.

By using TDC as a conceptual framework, this thesis will investigate how the EU as a representative of the global North deals with China as an emerging donor in Africa in terms of its (China's) foreign- and development policy. However, despite Stahl arguing that there are

insufficient theories that can explain how the EU deals with an emerging power - such as China – in the specific contextual framework of Africa, as the EU is the main unit of analysis, neoliberal institutionalism will, as aforementioned serve as the theoretical framework.

This theory chapter has elaborated on the theory of neoliberal institutionalism and the concept of TDC as well as explained how theory and concept will be applied in practice. The following chapter will therefore combine the data and the theory in order to form an analysis, beginning with an important historical background.

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## 4 Analysis

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The following chapter is divided into two main sections: the historical background and the discussion. The historical background provides an important historical context within which to place the EU, China and Africa together. The discussion section will attempt to illuminate whether the EU's recently proposed strategy for Africa is the result of an increased Chinese presence in Africa, by analysing six key EU documents as presented in the historical background section.

### 4.1 Historical background

In order to understand the current foreign- and development policies of the EU and China in Africa, it is necessary to place the EU's and China's development policies with a focus on their respective relations with Africa within a historical context. When it comes to development cooperation, Africa has historically played a prominent role as a recipient of development aid from both the EU and China. The following subsection will therefore begin with a historical background of China's development policy in Africa, followed by another subsection on the history of the EU's development policy in Africa, and concluding with a subsection on the history of the EU's and China's relations. For clarity's sake, the historical contexts for EU and China have been divided into phases, as elaborated by the reference literature used in this background section (Carbone, 2011a; X. Zhang, 2011).

#### 4.1.1 The history of China's development policy in Africa

The following subsection will cover the history of China's development policy. As its development policy has historically been particularly tied to its relations with Africa and because this thesis is looking at the EU and China in Africa from a foreign- and development policy perspective, the historical focus will be on Chinese foreign- and development policy in Africa.

According to Zhang Xinghui (2011) and Deborah Brautigam (2009), the history of China's development policy has gone through several phases over the past sixty years. Zhang divides it into four phases and also argues that China's development policy, foreign policy and domestic policy are closely interlinked.

##### 4.1.1.1 *The first phase*

Beginning with the creation of the PRC in 1949 the first phase ran from 1949 until 1978 and was a period marked by ideology and politics in terms of the nation's development policy. Chinese

diplomacy and foreign policy were thus greatly linked with development policy in the sense that development aid was used as a tool to further China's socialist ideology. Furthermore, several sets of foreign policy principles were presented by the Chinese government, one of the earliest and most important being the *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence*, laid out by the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in 1954: "mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; peaceful coexistence" (Brautigam, 2009, p. 30).

Moving further, in 1955 the Asian-African Conference (more commonly known as the Bandung Conference) took place in Bandung, Indonesia, forming "an important landmark in the growth of co-operation among the Asian-African peoples" (Appadorai, 1955, p. 207). Twenty-nine African and Asian nations participated, among them China, to form a common voice against colonialism. This setting enabled Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai to voice support to African nations struggling for independence and breaking away from imperialism (CVCE, 2020). The foreign policy objectives of both China as well as African countries were very much affected by the Cold War as well as the Western nations' historical power domination (Shinn & Eisenman, 2012, p. 33). Africa became an even more important partner for China to approach because of US and Soviet efforts to expand their relations with the continent as well as due to tensions with the two superpowers (Brautigam, 2008, p. 202; Sun, 2014, p. 3). Therefore, the Bandung Conference did indeed form an important landmark for Chinese relations to Africa, particularly through the reiteration of the *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* where the principle on "non-interference in internal affairs" is still very much relevant and in use in Chinese foreign- and development policy today (Brautigam, 2009, p. 24).

In particular countries in Africa were some of the most important elements as many of them experienced a period of postcolonial transition in the 1960s. Therefore, Chinese development policy was focussed on two aspects: "supporting African people in their struggle for national independence" and "uniting African countries in the struggle against colonialism and imperialism" (X. Zhang, 2011, p. 210). It was during this period – more specifically in 1963-1964 – that the first Chinese Premier, Zhou Enlai, during an official trip to Africa and Asia delivered the *Five Principles on China's Relations with African and Arab countries* as a strategy on how Chinese foreign policy with these countries would be conducted.

What is more, in Ghana in 1964, during his official tour of Africa, Premier Zhou Enlai also put forward *The Chinese Government's Eight Principles for Economic Aid and Technical Assistance to Other Countries*. In summary, these eight principles basically outlined terms that would focus on development aid with mutual benefits, equality, respect of national sovereignty, low-interest loans,

and quick and cost-efficient project investments. China's foreign aid projects proved to indeed be beneficial for the nation's foreign policy objectives: the Tanzania-Zambia railway project – beginning construction in 1970 and became operational in 1975 – is such an example of Chinese foreign aid having led to positive gains for China. Zhang argues that increased Chinese foreign aid projects in Africa during this period managed to garner the support of many African countries that would later contribute to China gaining a seat on the UN Security Council in 1971 (2011, p. 211). This endorsement is still today being acknowledged by the Chinese government, as former President Hu Jintao at a FOCAC summit in 2006 expressed gratitude to the support from the African countries to “restore the lawful rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations” (Hu, 2006, as cited by X. Zhang, 2011, p. 211).

#### **4.1.1.2 The second phase**

The second phase of China's development policy was focussed on reforms, from 1979 to 1988. After the end of the Cultural Revolution and the death of Chairman Mao Zedong, both in 1976, there came a period of reformation of the Chinese economy towards a socialist market economy, mainly under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping (Brautigam, 2009, p. 9). Engagement with Africa was deemed as relevant as previously, and in 1982 Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang declared four new foreign aid principles: “equality and mutual benefit; stress on practical results; diversity in form; and common progress” (Brautigam, 2009, p. 53). Due to the massive shift in Chinese economic policies, there was a temporary decrease of foreign aid in the early 1980s, but by 1984 China had announced foreign aid commitments of 258.9 million USD to Africa, rendering China one of the world's largest foreign aid donors to the continent (Brautigam, 2008, p. 204; X. Zhang, 2011, p. 212).

#### **4.1.1.3 The third phase**

The third phase continued after the fall of communism in Europe in 1989 and was marked by a period of transition as well as some diplomatic clashes in the international arena. China struggled with diplomatic ties with some African nations that would come to recognise the Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan, launching a “bidding war” for foreign aid opportunities in Africa between the PRC and the ROC. In addition, in 1986 China submitted its application to join the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT – later the WTO), a process that would require China to commit to aid reforms (Brautigam, 2009, pp. 67–69; X. Zhang, 2011, pp. 212–213).

According to Deborah Brautigam (2009) these reforms in this period of transition brought two significant effects to China's relations with Africa. In 1994 the Chinese government therefore established three policy banks: China Development Bank, China Export Import Bank and China Agricultural Bank. According to neoliberal institutionalism, by adhering to the international regime

of the GATT, China deemed it favourable to adjust its policies in order to facilitate its future relationships with other global actors. These institutions would form a new modernised toolbox for Chinese foreign aid and are also a demonstration of the importance ascribed to institutions by neoliberal institutionalism. The second effect was that China saw the market potential in Africa, while Western countries viewed it as a “failed continent” (Brautigam, 2009, p. 69). Since 1991, every year Chinese foreign ministers have made Africa the first official state visit after the New Year, which is according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China due to the “special feelings of friendship from generation to generation and sharing weal and woe between China and Africa” as well as in order to “deep[en] cooperation and common development” and “[strengthen] international cooperation and safeguarding common interests between China and Africa” (A. Li, 2008; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2020). This quote is also an example of neoliberal institutionalist concepts in that China considers that cooperation leads to ensuring that common objectives can be attained.

In 1996 when Chinese President Jiang Zemin was on an official tour in several African countries, he announced in a speech to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) a five-point proposal for an even closer cooperation between China and Africa, *Toward a New Historical Milestone of Sino-African Friendship* (Taylor, 2011, p. 35). The proposal went very much on the same lines as *The Chinese Government’s Eight Principles for Economic Aid and Technical Assistance to Other Countries*, but it goes without saying that this time it was specifically focussing on Africa. Conclusively, the proposal materialised in the creation of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), that would be held for the first time in October 2000. President Jiang highlighted the importance of South-South Cooperation (SSC) and the summit concluded with the Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation that outlined the forum’s main scope, underlining the status of developing countries of both African countries as well as China (Taylor, 2011, pp. 39–41).

#### **4.1.1.4 The fourth phase**

The end of this period of transition paved the way for the partnership phase, in which China reinforced its commitment to its relations with Africa. President Hu Jintao introduced new measures to the Chinese development cooperation toolbox. Before the third FOCAC summit in 2006, the Chinese government also adopted an official *Africa Policy* White Paper – the first of its kind – that would guide China’s relations with Africa (Taylor, 2011, p. 65; X. Zhang, 2011, p. 2013). The elements of the *Africa Policy* became fundamental for China’s “no strings attached policy”, as it is today often referred to, reflecting the Chinese non-interference policy dating back to the elaboration of the *Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* in 1954 (X. Li, 2018).

Consequently, the relations between China and Africa have now resulted in China being Africa's most important trade partner. Some Western scholars and professionals argue that part of China's strategy with Africa is to secure resources, in particular oil and minerals, by offering "low-cost financing and cheap labour for infrastructure projects" (Carbone, 2011b, p. 207; McDonnell, 2014; Smith, 2013; X. Zhang, 2011, p. 217). Some also assert that "China's Africa policy lacks a comprehensive, long-term, strategic vision" because of a highly bureaucratic system (Sun, 2014, p. 30). Nevertheless, it can be argued that China is acting according to the neoliberal institutionalist concept of complex interdependence, where cooperation through trade is essential. The next subsection will shortly present the newly established China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) that was created in order to efficiently streamline Chinese aid and potentially appease Western criticism so as to be explained as a policy coordination as elaborated by neoliberal institutionalism.

#### **4.1.1.5 The China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA)**

In April 2018 the Chinese government officially established the nation's first foreign aid agency – the vice-ministerial China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) (D. Zhang & Ji, 2020). The aim of the agency, as expressed by President Xi Jinping in February 2017, is to coordinate China's foreign aid in a manner that is more efficient and supports the governmental reforms of the Chinese foreign aid system (K. Huang, 2017). According to the official website of CIDCA:

The agency aims to formulate strategic guidelines, plans and policies for foreign aid, coordinate and offer advice on major foreign aid issues, advance the country's reforms in matters involving foreign aid, and identify major programs and supervise and evaluate their implementation. (CIDCA, 2018)

Until the formation of CIDCA, Chinese foreign aid had been a shared responsibility between the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and the Ministry of Finance (MoF) (Rudyak, 2019, pp. 1–2). However, these government agencies still employ a certain degree of influence, in particular MOFCOM and MFA from which two of the three vice chairmen have been appointed (UNDP, 2019). The CIDCA gained personnel from MOFCOM's Department of Foreign Aid (DFA). Furthermore, the foreign aid agency should also promote Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and answers to State Councillor and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi (D. Zhang & Ji, 2020). Regardless of what the main objective is with this newly established agency, it can surely be viewed as a further institutionalisation of Chinese foreign- and development policies. Furthermore, this could also be an example of China adhering to the neoliberal institutionalist concept of rules and norms of the international regime, where it is common for an actor (state or supranational institution like the EU) to have an agency or

department specifically designated for development cooperation. Of course, the establishment CIDCA is probably primarily for China's benefit, but in theory it should address some of the shortcomings of Chinese development policy, as elaborated by Western observers. Thus the establishment of CIDCA could be argued to be an example of the neoliberal institutionalist notion of policy coordination or adjustment, where China has adjusted part of its development policy in order to facilitate cooperation with other actors such as Africa and the EU, while at the same time reaping the benefits it provides to China as well, such as international recognition of its international development work.

The following subsection will describe the historical context of the EU's relations with Africa within a development policy context.

#### **4.1.2 The history of the EU's development policy in Africa**

This subsection will look into the EU's relations with Africa from a historical perspective within the context of EU's foreign- and development policies. It can be said that particularly in historical terms the development policy of the EU is closely linked to its relations with Africa, hence why the following section will describe this linkage in a historical context (Smith, 2018, p. 257). Maurizio Carbone establishes three main phases of EU's development policy for Africa (2011a, p. 158) .

##### **4.1.2.1 The first phase – 1950s to 1980s**

During the Treaty of Rome negotiations in 1955-1957, Pierre Moussa, then director of the French Ministry of the Overseas, planted the seed to the future relationship between the EU and Africa when he pleaded that the French and Belgian colonies were indispensable for the Common Market, arguing that the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) should be included (Hansen & Jonsson, 2014, pp. 147–149). France and Belgium were worried that their own trade with their colonies and overseas territories would suffer from being challenged by the EEC (Babarinde, 2019, p. 113).

In the early days of the EU's development policy there was a struggle between the regionalists, who wanted to focus on delivering aid to the member states' colonies, and the globalists, who wanted a wider scope by looking to eradicate global poverty. However, due to the French plea to grant a special status to the OCTs – of which many were in Africa – the final draft of the development chapter in the Treaty of Rome thus highlighted the importance of a close association between the EEC (EU) and the OCTs. This part of the treaty essentially “linked France and Belgium's colonies to the then European Economic Community (EEC) by extending preferential terms of trade with all of the EEC member states” (Kotsopoulos & Mattheis, 2018, p.

445). In addition, the European Development Fund (EDF) was also created, which today serves as “the main source of EU development aid for the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and the overseas territories” (European Commission, 2020a). At first its main purpose was to be a source of EU development funding for the African countries that the member states had special attachments to:

The 1957 Treaty of Rome made provision for its creation with a view to granting technical and financial assistance, initially to African countries with which some Member States had historical links. (EUR-Lex, 2014)

The relationship between the EU and Africa was deemed an association, in that the OCTs did not gain the status of full membership but instead associates of the EEC, beginning as “a primarily (neo)colonial and paternalistic donor-recipient relationship” (Babarinde, 2019, pp. 111–112). In the meantime, Africa was enveloped in a wave of countries gaining or looking to gain independence from their colonial masters, not to mention the 1963 creation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) with one of the main aims being to eradicate colonialism on the continent as well as the effects of the Bandung Conference (Babarinde, 2019, p. 113). That same year the Implementing Convention on the Association of the Overseas Countries and Territories with the Community (the EEC) – part of the implementation of the Treaty of Rome – expired. This prompted the member states to consider negotiating another agreement, resulting in the Yaoundé Convention that was implemented in 1964 and later renewed as Yaoundé II in 1969. Some of the major features of the Yaoundé Conventions were the same as those that guided the previous Association agreement: “principles of free trade, reciprocity, and non-discrimination” (Babarinde, 2019, p. 114).

The accession to the EEC of the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark in 1973 paved the way for a new trade agreement between the EEC member states and 46 ACP states that was signed in 1975 in Lomé, Togo, hence why it was called the Lomé Convention. It was deemed as a prime example of North-South development in that it “set up a predictable aid flow [...] based on the individual needs of the recipient countries” and “established a system of non-reciprocal trade preferences” which provided the ACP group of states with tariff- and quota free export access to the EEC market, all underpinned by a principle of equality between the two parties (Carbone, 2011a, p. 158). Apart from various trade and development schemes that were designed to primarily help the development of the ACP states, the Lomé conventions also established several institutional structures that would facilitate the dialogue between the EEC and the ACP states. Finally, the Lomé Convention also introduced stabilization schemes in the event of price fluctuations for mineral and agricultural commodity exports, SYSMIN and STABEX (Carbone, 2017, p. 294). The relationship between the EU and Africa would, however, be marked by the

events of the 1970s such as the 1973 oil crisis and the developing countries' plea for a New International Economic Order (NIEO), the latter being disregarded and instead replaced by the Washington Consensus (Oloruntoba, 2016, p. 73).

#### **4.1.2.2 The second phase – 1980s to 1990s**

The 1980s and the 1990s brought more changes on a global scale that would affect the development policy of the EU: the Treaty of Maastricht, the establishment of neoliberalism and the Washington Consensus, the end of the Cold War. Some amendments were made to the following Lomé Conventions (II, III and IV) in order to follow the original aim of combining aid with trade so as to be “an engine of economic growth and development” (Babarinde, 2019, p. 114).

However, similarly to China, EU aid funds to Africa began to decline and aid conditionality became a prominent development policy strategy for the EU. Conditionality was of a dual nature – political and economic. Economic conditionality referred to adhering to neoliberal financial policies and political conditionalities included making political reforms of democratisation such as respect of human rights and the rule of law (Carbone, 2011a, p. 158). The EU thus took on a more prominent global role while the import of products from Africa and other states in the ACP group decreased during this phase as did EU development aid and instead the EU focussed its funds and resources on rebuilding Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War (Oloruntoba, 2016, p. 74). In addition, as the Lomé Conventions provided the ACP group of states with preferential access to the European Common Market, the WTO warned the EU that the Conventions went against the international WTO trade regulations, hence why the EU saw a need for a new and revised trade agreement (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2014, p. 214).

#### **4.1.2.3 The third phase – 2000s to present day**

As Lomé IV expired in 2000 and as a consequence of the criticism from the WTO, the European Commission called for a revitalized agreement, respecting the WTO terms so as to not discriminate non-ACP states (Carbone, 2017, p. 294). Reviewing the Lomé agreements, the EU's development policy had gradually moved towards a more global stance, aligning with rules and norms practiced by the major international institutions of the world such as the IMF and the World Bank, including the extension of aid conditionality. Thus, with the accelerated globalization, a new agreement, the Cotonou Agreement, between the EU and the ACP countries entered into force in 2000 for a period of 20 years with a revision every five years, focussing not only on trade as previous agreements, but also on political conditions such as good governance and democratisation (Carbone, 2011a, p. 160). In addition, the Cotonou Agreement also encouraged the engagement and the role of non-state actors such as the private sector, civil society, and NGOs. In 2000 the

first Africa-EU Summit was held in Cairo, organised by the OAU (later AU) and the EU, resulting in the adoption of the Cairo Declaration, committing the African and European leaders to striving towards “a new strategic dimension to the global partnership between Africa and Europe” – the Africa-EU Partnership (African Union & European Union, 2019a).

In 2005 the European Consensus on Development was established as the first “policy platform setting out common objectives and principles of development co-operation for both the EU and its member states” (Carbone, 2011a, p. 161). The Consensus committed both the EU as a whole as well as the member states to policy guidelines and objectives that included the main objective of eradicating poverty worldwide, but also core liberal values such as democracy, equality, and rule of law, and development-related objectives such as ownership and participation. The Consensus also pledged to uphold the values of multilateralism following the UN framework of “a system of rules, institutions and international instruments set up and implemented by the international community”. This would later also translate into the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) that was adopted in 2007 by the 27 European and 54 African leaders, as well as by the EU and the African Union (AU) following on the commitments made during the 2000 Cairo Summit (African Union & European Union, 2019c).

The latest major foreign- and development policy events between Africa and the EU is the Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs, as announced by then President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, followed by the new Commission’s initiative to establish a comprehensive strategy with Africa (European Commission & EEAS, 2020). Some observers have argued that these accelerated moves towards Africa from the EU’s side are a response to China’s increased engagement in Africa, initiating a “new scramble for Africa” (The Economist, 2019). The history of the relations between the EU and China will therefore be elaborated in the next subsection.

### **4.1.3 The history of EU and China relations**

The first official building stone to lay down to the foundation of EU-China relations was the then Commissioner Sir Christopher Soames’ official trip to China in 1973 after the EC had officially recognized the People’s Republic of China (Michalski & Pan, 2017, pp. 41–42). As the EU was not involved in any conflicts or disputes with China, it was viewed by China as a “challenge to the bipolar status quo”, thus forming an appealing future partner as it constituted a less complicated and more reliable relationship for China than with the US and the Soviet Union (Michalski & Pan, 2017, p. 43; Vichitsoratsatra, 2009, p. 70). Official diplomatic relations between EU and China were formalised in 1975 after China had welcomed the enlargement of the Union in 1973. This

paved the way for the first trade agreement to be signed between the EU and China in 1978. Although the trade agreement would not grant China the same favourable treatment as GATT member states, it was still a historical event. In addition, this is an early example of the concept of neoliberal institutionalist notion of interaction in multiple channels beyond state boundaries between different type of actors, in this case between a state and a supranational institution representing its member states that adhere to its formalised rules, regulations and norms.

In 1979 the then President of the European Commission, Roy Jenkins, went on an official visit to China with the main aim being to establish a closer relationship for future engagement, particularly in trade. This led to a 1979 textile agreement being signed and subsequently in 1985 a trade and cooperation agreement. Diplomatic engagement increased as well with the establishment of an EU delegation in Beijing in 1988. This is another example of neoliberal institutionalist cooperation, where the EU and China agree to additional economic cooperation that would ultimately lead to increased economic interdependence over the years.

All was proceeding positively until the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident which led to the EU suspending its diplomatic relations with China as well as imposing an arms embargo that is still active as of today (European Commission, 2017; Michalski & Pan, 2017, p. 48). According to neoliberal institutionalism, when an actor does not adhere to the liberal regime, punishment through sanctions is due, in this case an arms embargo (Powell, 1991, p. 1306). Nevertheless, China continued on its journey of opening up to the West and the EU continued on with its enlargement and development. Gradually the EU had re-established its diplomatic relations with China after 1989 and by 1995 the European Commission issued a communication, *A Long-term Policy for China-Europe Relations*, that would be the first time from the EU's side to propose a strategy for China. In this strategy paper the Commission endorsed Chinese endeavours in international cooperation and vouched for its commitment to ensure China's membership application to the WTO would be successful (Michalski & Pan, 2017, p. 45). The strategy paper also included EU's offering of help to China when it came to sustainable development. For both the EU and China the strategy paper offered a solidification of both actors' aims to extend their influence globally.

Another communication from the European Commission was issued in 1998 on a comprehensive China-EU partnership, strongly supported by both actors (Michalski & Pan, 2017, p. 46). The same year the first EU-China summit was held in London, and this forum has to this day become one of the most public and well-known modalities in which the EU and China further establish their relationship. In the 2000s, while increased dialogue and diplomatic engagement continued between the EU and China, the EU was concerned with China's lack of progress in the fields of human rights and democracy (Michalski 47). Consequently, in 2003 China published its

first strategy document about the EU where it praised European integration and the Union's increasingly important global role. China also stipulated the importance of the EU adhering to the "One-China" policy as well as pleading for a lifting of the arms embargo. That same year in October at the China-EU Summit both actors mutually recognised each other as being in a strategic partnership through a joint statement where they claimed that the expanded relations between China and EU were "an indicator of the increasing maturity and growing strategic nature of the partnership" (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 2). This phase in EU-China relations in the early 2000s has been referred to as the "honeymoon phase" (Geeraerts, 2013, p. 493; Michalski & Pan, 2017, p. 46). This is, as according to neoliberal institutionalism, the result of the economic interdependence between the EU and China that began in the 1970s.

The mid-2000s, however, would prove to be marked by cooler relations as the financial crisis of 2008 hit Europe hard, whereas China's economy instead grew during this time (Michalski p 50). The strategic partnership was not codified, but its creation would later be referred to in the *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation*, a later jointly adopted EU-China publication, as having a substantial impact on the deepening of the relationship. The abovementioned joint statement was released in 2013 as a demonstration of the strengthened and extended relations. The Strategic Agenda would ensure the continuity of the relationship through regular meetings divided into three pillars: "the annual High Level Strategic Dialogue, the annual High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue, and the bi-annual People-to-People Dialogue" (European Union & Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2013, p. 2). The result of the improved relations between EU and China was that China released an updated EU strategy paper in 2014 and that same year President Xi Jinping made a historic visit to the EU headquarters in Brussels as the first Chinese leader to do so (China Daily, 2014; Michalski & Pan, 2017, p. 52). In 2019 the European Commission and EEAS issued a joint communication evaluating the strategic partnership between EU and China, *EU-China – A strategic outlook*. In this communication China is referred to as being simultaneously a cooperation partner, a negotiating partner, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival (European Commission & EEAS, 2019, p. 1). This description essentially embodies the core concepts of neoliberal institutionalism. The EU sees China as a partner in cooperation with which it negotiates to attain common objectives, while at the same time acknowledging the fact that the rising multipolar global order with multiple actors trading more and more with each other leads to competition. Finally, China is a systemic rival because while it does adhere to the international regime by being a member of many of the same international organisations as the EU, the EU is not yet certain whether China has the same aspirations as pertains to the values and norms of the international regime. This could be viewed

as an indirect reference to, among others, China's development engagement in Africa where the non-interference policy goes against the EU's development policies that apply conditionality by referring to established rules and norms of the international development regime, such as the rule of law, democracy and human rights.

This section has covered three different historical perspectives that are of importance for the analysis in this thesis: China and Africa, the EU and Africa, and the EU and China. The purpose of this historical background is to set the stage for the next section, which is the discussion. The following discussion section will therefore attempt to illuminate the current state of the relationship between EU and China with particular regards to Africa in the context of the new European Commission's objective to establish a new comprehensive strategy with Africa.

## **4.2 Discussion**

This section will attempt to illuminate to what extent the EU's current foreign- and development policy towards Africa has been affected by China's increased engagement in Africa. Through the application of the theoretical framework of neoliberal institutionalism, the contents of key EU documents pertaining to China and Africa will be examined. The first subsection concerns the EU's relationship with China with a concentration on the most recent policy framework that the EU is conducting towards China. The second section covers the EU's most recent foreign- and development policy strategies towards Africa with an emphasis on the proposed comprehensive strategy of the new European Commission. The aim is to assess to what extent this proposed strategy may or may not be a reaction to China's increased engagement in Africa. The final section will assess whether the previous sections can establish if the attempted trilateral development cooperation (TDC) between the EU, Africa and China can materialise in the spirit of institutionalism or if it is doomed to obscurity due to different motivations and interests.

### **4.2.1 EU proposing trilateral cooperation**

Following the declaration from the November 2006 FOCAC Summit where China and 48 African states jointly reinforced their common pursuit in promoting "friendship, peace, cooperation and development", the Council of the EU issued a press release after the December 2006 European Council meeting (FOCAC, 2006). The press release indicated that the EU member states were eager to begin a dialogue on Africa with China as "this is an area of key strategic interest to both the EU and China, demonstrated by the EU's strategy on Africa and the China-Africa Cooperation Forum in Beijing in November 2006" (Council of the European Union, 2006, p. 7). The following

year the acceleration of the notion of trilateral cooperation with China in Africa was a fact, after the EU had conducted several dialogues with Chinese and African representatives (Carbone, 2011b, p. 208).

This could be an example of how the EU in its relations with China is attempting to engage in cooperation. As Keohane points out, there can be three different results in the relations between states and other states or international organizations. Harmony would possibly be a dream come true for the EU, but this would imply that the policies of both the EU and China are fine the way they are in that these facilitate the attainment of both the EU's and China's goals. As two actors with rather different historical backgrounds, this would indeed be rather unrealistic. For example, while China, as a developing country, was participating in the Bandung Conference in 1955 to support then- and former colonies, many of these in Africa, to become independent and to give a voice to the developing world, the EU, as part of the developed world, was forming with pressure from France to ensure trade relations are kept with French colonies, many of these in Africa, so as to ensure the facilitation of mutual trade, albeit leading to an asymmetric interdependence. Discord is not desirable, wherein this would imply that the EU's and China's policies would be seen as either actor to be hindering the achievement of their goals. Furthermore, if neither the EU or China would be willing to compromise and negotiate, discord would occur. Finally, cooperation would then be optimal, which could be the result of the EU's following proposal for cooperation with China and Africa.

Thus the European Commission issued a communication in 2008 officially launching the notion of trilateral cooperation with China and Africa. It proposed an expansion of the already existing dialogues between the EU and Africa, and the EU and China. The Commission pledged for this dialogue to take place on multiple levels - continental, regional, and national – giving the African Union (AU) an important role. This is an example of the neoliberal institutionalist explanation of interaction via multiple channels, where dialogue would take place not only on state-level, but to also engage with another organisation such as the AU. What is more, the Commission urged for Africa to be a much more prevalent topic in the bilateral dialogues between the EU and China, as in the recurring EU-China summits, considering both actors' increasingly expanding strategies on Africa. It further proposed to “organise an annual meeting of senior officials (EU-AU-China) at the rotating initiative of the partners to coordinate dialogue and cooperation strategically” (European Commission, 2008, p. 8). In addition, the Commission recognised China as a “re-emerged” global power that as a consequence had increased its activities in Africa, including in development cooperation where the Commission acknowledged that China's own experience with poverty reduction was a helping factor (European Commission,

2008, p. 3). The document further stated that it was in the interest of both the EU and China to promote the sustainable development of Africa, as evidenced by the results from the 2007 China-EU Summit in Beijing where both parts “welcomed more practical cooperation by the two sides through their existing cooperating mechanisms with Africa” (European Commission, 2008, p. 4). However, as the then European Commissioner for Development ended his mandate in 2009, so did the dream of trilateral cooperation. Nevertheless, this could be an early example of the neoliberal institutionalist concept of cooperation and interdependence, but in a trilateral cooperation setting, something that is not specifically referred to by Keohane and Nye. On the other hand, according to TDC as explained by Stahl, the EU was attempting to initiate a formalised partnership with an actor representing the developing world and an actor representing an emerging power that had previously been considered a developing country. Using neoliberal institutionalism as well as the concept of TDC, both offering solutions to dealing with an arising multipolar international arena, this was a way in which the EU attempted to handle a changing world with emerging powers possibly challenging the existing international regime. Conflict is not a solution, but cooperation and partnership.

Following this, it is indeed clear that the EU was aware of China’s rising status in the international arena, as acknowledged by both the EU and China in the joint 2013 *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation*. The strategic agenda subscribed to the fact that cooperation between the two had grown increasingly since the 2003 establishment of the EU-China comprehensive strategic partnership. The *Strategic Agenda* highlights the fact that:

The world of today is experiencing profound and complex changes. As important actors in a multipolar world, the EU and China share responsibility for promoting peace, prosperity and sustainable development for the benefit of all. They agree to continue to consolidate and develop their strategic partnership to the benefit of both sides, based on the principles of equality, respect and trust. (European Union & Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2013, p. 2)

However, the *Strategic Agenda* only includes one short point on EU-China cooperation in international development:

Strengthen EU-China dialogue and cooperation on major international development issues as well as their respective development policies, including efforts to formulate and implement post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals. Both sides agree to start an annual development dialogue at senior official level. (European Union & Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2013, p. 14)

These two citations are examples of how the EU and China reinforced their relationship in a neoliberal institutionalist spirit, where interaction between a supranational institution actor and a state actor would in theory lead to benefits for all parties. In addition, neoliberal institutionalism attempts to explain the world of international politics in a post-war world order

where multipolarity is becoming the norm, and it is clear that both the EU and China acknowledge this and therefore consider that conflict is a thing of the past, the future is cooperation through strategic partnerships.

According to a press release from the European Commission after the 2019 EU-China Summit, the *Council Conclusions on the EU's Strategy on China* and the *Elements for a New Strategy on China* form the current policy framework for the EU's policy towards China (European Commission, 2019a). The press release referred to the review of the EU-China relations in the *EU-China – A strategic outlook* communication paper that sets out ten actions for consideration. The *Elements for a New Strategy on China* communication declares that while the *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation* is a valuable foreign policy tool for elaborating on the two actors' relationship, there is still a need for a comprehensive strategy from the EU's side:

[O]ne which puts its own interests at the forefront in the new relationship; which promotes universal values; which recognises the need for and helps to define an increased role for China in the international system; and is based on a positive agenda of partnership coupled with the constructive management of differences. (European Commission & EEAS, 2016, p. 2)

In addition, the communication also acknowledges the emerging force of China and its accelerated strive to become a more global player. Furthermore, it also mentions the fact that China has become more active in the international arena in fields such as development, after having taken a more passive stance previously. The concept of multipolarity is prevalent in the communication and the description of the US as a less reliable partner is put forward, ascribing the EU with the epithet of “a more balanced partner” (European Commission & EEAS, 2016, p. 10) (p 10 elements new strategy). This could be interpreted as an invitation to China to follow the EU in a deepened cooperation that is built upon the EU's core values that are synonymous with the rules and norms of the international regime in line with neoliberal institutionalist theory. At the same time, as neoliberal institutionalism does not disregard an actor's own objectives, the EU considers that it is possible to simultaneously be in a relation of cooperation with China while at the same time ensuring that it is driven by its own interests and norms.

The EU thus represents an international institution that has “become sufficiently strong to meet the challenges of a globalized international economy” (Gilpin, 2001, p. 379). However, is the international regime still one where primarily Western powers shape the world order? It is possible to change an existing international regime, although it is certainly not an easy endeavour to take on. As demonstrated in the 1970s by several LDCs developing countries' revolutionary idea to establish a New International Economic Order (NIEO), that is, changing the existing international regime. In spite of this, a new world order never materialised, as they “were eventually forced to accept the dictates of the major powers” (Gilpin, 2001, p. 386).

Nevertheless, the EU recognises in its 2016 *Elements for a New Strategy* that China's influence in the international arena is growing and accelerating and mentions how China is becoming more active in several areas, including in development. In the *Council Conclusions on the EU Strategy on China*, the EU member states acknowledge the potential of increased future cooperation with China in the areas of security and defence, particularly mentioning Africa (Council of the European Union, 2016, p. 7). Furthermore, the member states commend China's efforts in addressing global challenges through the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda could be an example of the international development regime, where all actors – developed and developing countries, organisations, private sector, etc. – gain benefits from adhering to it. This could be a neoliberal institutionalist example of the EU attempting to negotiate with China by demonstrating that China is adhering to the current international development regime and therefore the EU is willing to accept cooperation with China in the common objectives that make out the 2030 Agenda.

The EU is evidently a strong advocate of multilateralism, in particular the UN's 2030 Agenda that is implemented in the policy frameworks of the working areas of the European Commission, not to mention in the European Consensus on Development. The Consensus emphasises good governance, human rights, rule of law, and democracy, and forms the basis for the EU's aid conditionality. Following this, the EU's development policy also adheres to the international development regime as set down by the OECD DAC (Stahl, 2018, pp. 98–99). It can be argued that the EU would want China to acknowledge its status as an emerging power and that China is no longer a developing country, thus granting China both more possibilities as well as more responsibilities in the international arena. If China would become a member of the DAC, it would have to declare all the statistics and procedures of its aid structure, including how much money China invests in aid in developing countries.

#### **4.2.2 EU towards Africa – glancing at China?**

The 2007 Joint EU-Africa Strategy (JAES) through which the two actors aim for a modernised relationship that goes beyond the traditional donor-recipient relationship is considered by some observers to be a reaction to China's increased activities in Africa (Carbone, 2011b; Melander, 2007; Stahl, 2018). Furthermore, as the EU has traditionally conducted its development policy model with a focus on the recipient's economic development, the JAES paved the way for policy changes in both directions. The EU recognises its interdependence with Africa, and in recent years even more so as cooperation with a thriving Africa could lead to a better management of, for example, irregular migration (African Union & European Union, 2019b). However, this more

pragmatic approach taken by the EU has been criticised by some observers as being rather cruel and self-serving (Green, 2020; Rankin, 2017). Nevertheless, this interaction resulted in what neoliberal institutionalism deems as cooperation. From the EU's side, it had to adjust its policies so as to coordinate them better with those of Africa's. The aim could possibly also have been a way in which to attempt to avoid an asymmetric interdependence, as the EU took into account the needs of the African countries, where African policies in their turn were the result of the cooperation with China. The EU and Africa, similarly to China and Africa, coordinated their policies so as to benefit them both. Africa needed a bigger focus on economic development, whereas the EU needed a bigger focus on migration management, so they attempted to meet somewhere in the middle.

The most recent embodiment of the relations between the EU and Africa is the EU's proposal for a new comprehensive strategic partnership with Africa, following the same pragmatic approach as previously criticised by some. The March 2020 joint communication from the European Commission and the EEAS emphasises five areas of importance in the future partnership: green transition and energy access; digital transformation; sustainable growth and jobs; peace and governance; and migration and mobility (European Commission & EEAS, 2020, p. 2). Peace and governance stands as the more traditional pillar, but the other four areas could very well be inspired by the Chinese approach to Africa. It could be interpreted from a neoliberal institutionalist perspective that the EU, once again, is willing to adjust some of its policies so as to meet Africa in the middle, while still looking towards the potential of mutual benefits of their cooperation. Most importantly, the Communication acknowledges the presence of other actors in Africa:

Africa's potential attracts increased interest from many players on the world scene. This is a welcome development, as it increases Africa's options and creates room for synergies. It also means that Europe [...] must adapt the way it engages with Africa, ensuring its positioning in line with our mutual interests, and giving more prominence to values, key principles, and good regulatory practices. (European Commission & EEAS, 2020, p. 2)

While this excerpt does not explicitly mention China, one can assume, considering China's current stance as one of Africa's most important trading partners, that it is an indirect reference. The key part of this excerpt lies in the EU's sense of urgency in adapting its approach to Africa, because of the "many players on the world scene". Conclusively, the EU is thus willing to adjust its policy framework in order to better align with Africa's objectives, which arguably have been more successfully met by China in a spirit of mutual benefits. The neoliberal institutionalist notion of policy coordination could be what the EU is doing in its newly proposed comprehensive strategic partnership with Africa, where the relationship between China and Africa has been founded on mutual benefits and a focus on trade.

Furthermore, if one examines the current President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen's mission letter to the newly elected European Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen, there is another example of an indirect reference to China, in particular its development policy:

The European Union and its Member States are world leaders in international cooperation and development support. In an increasingly unsettled world, where different development models increasingly compete, the partnerships of equals we build are essential for our future. (European Commission, 2019b, p. 4)

The newly proposed comprehensive strategic partnership between the EU and Africa is not a clear and concrete set of measures, it is rather a policy framework to which the EU possibly hopes that Africa too will align itself to. The EU has been criticised in the past by its African partners for not properly facilitating the development of African industries, but instead unilaterally setting the rules of the game through conditionality in order to primarily benefit itself (Fox, 2020). Similarly, criticism towards the EU's relations with Africa has also come from the European side, in the sense that observers have admonished the EU for not attributing sufficient ownership and participation to its African counterparts when it comes to the elaboration of a new comprehensive strategic partnership (Teevan & Sherriff, 2019, p. 4). In addition, the description of the competition between different development models - in which assumingly China is one competitor – is rather contradictory, if the EU would wish to establish a trilateral development cooperation with China and Africa.

#### **4.2.3 Towards trilateral cooperation between the EU, Africa and China**

A potential trilateral development cooperation between the EU, Africa and China could be seen as a truly neoliberal institutionalist objective in that all three actors could have a common interest in cooperation, by combining their different experiences, skills and assets. However, if one takes into account the subtleties in EU strategy papers, it can prove difficult to assess whether the EU views China as a partner or a rival in its engagement in Africa.

At a high-level investment forum in Vienna in 2018, the then President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, said in an opening statement that for Europe "Africa's future is also our future". As he was prompted about Europe being too slow in investing in the African continent while other actors were quicker, he replied "Yes, but we do it better" (Deutsche Welle (DW), 2018b). This could serve as a compact description of the EU's perception of its own activities in Africa as compared to other actors' – it considers itself better because it follows the rules-based order and adheres to principles of multilateralism, an example of the neoliberal institutionalist concept of the international regime. Consequently, in September 2018 the

European Commission issued a communication on a new Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs, only a week after the 7<sup>th</sup> FOCAC Summit in Beijing had concluded with China committing to a 60 billion USD aid investment in infrastructure projects in Africa (Deutsche Welle (DW), 2018a; European Commission, 2018). The Alliance set out a list of ten actions to engage in, most of which are related to involving the private sector and generating jobs. Involving the private sector is another example of neoliberal institutionalism, as according to Keohane and Nye interaction takes place in multiple channels between a variety of actors.

As evidenced by the history of China's development policy towards Africa, there has always been a connection to its foreign policy as well. With the current world order becoming increasingly multipolar, emerging countries such as China have contributed to the reorganisation of the neoliberal institutionalist patterns of cooperation. Furthermore, China's principle of mutual benefits could be a representation of the objective of the neoliberal institutionalist notion of cooperation. For example, the relationship between China and Africa is based on primarily the actors' own self-interests, but they have been willing to adjust their policies, particularly with regards to Taiwan, so as to achieve absolute gains. However, it is important to note that it could also possibly be an asymmetric interdependence; for China it has always been crucial that a partner adheres to its One China policy. When some African countries decided to recognise Taiwan, diplomatic ties were severed. Subsequently, countries like Niger, Chad and Malawi broke off diplomatic relations with Taiwan in order to improve the relationship with China (Sun, 2014, p. 5). This could be an example of an asymmetric interdependence in that these African countries had a higher degree of vulnerability in their interdependence with China, in that the cooperation or lack thereof would result in significantly more costly effects for them than for China, giving China more power in the relationship of interdependence.

The EU too has adjusted its policy frameworks, as according to neoliberal institutionalism, by amalgamating foreign-, trade- and development policy by, for example, introducing the private sector as an important factor in the development cooperation with Africa. Consequently, this resonates much more with China's strategy towards Africa, for the EU is not aiming for global hegemony, but rather global multilateral cooperation. Similarly, China, too, has restructured its strategies in the past thirty years so as to align itself with the values of multilateralism as stipulated by the UN as well as becoming a member of the WTO (Christiansen, 2016, p. 29). Most importantly, the EU has established formal strategic frameworks in its relationships with both China and Africa. These strategic partnerships are the result of the interdependence between actors; the EU and China gain mutual benefits from trading with each other, and the EU and Africa too. The latter also claims to mutually benefit the social dimension by generating jobs

through investment in the African continent, and at the same time managing irregular migration into the EU. In addition, it is possible that the establishment of CIDCA is a step that China has taken towards a more transparent and cooperative spirit in the area of international development cooperation. Thus, by creating an institution that has similar objectives and obligations as other international actors' development institutions, China has acted in the spirit of neoliberal institutionalism, by aligning its development policy more with other important global aid actors, such as the EU with its Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO).

The latest EU strategy paper on its relationship with China, *EU-China – A strategic outlook*, outlines China rather ambivalently, in that the EU considers that it has “closely aligned objectives” with China while at the same time being a “systemic rival” that stands for a different way in which it views and navigates in the international system (European Commission & EEAS, 2019, p. 1). The strategy paper further perpetuates the competitive stance by noting China's aim to “become a leading global power”. In addition, the EU contends that China cannot be viewed as a developing country anymore, due to China's extended influence in the global sphere. Nevertheless, the EU also asserts that it must itself be prepared to adapt and adjust its policies in order to uphold its prosperity, particularly when it comes to economy and trade. As for development cooperation, the EU declares that as China is increasingly emerging as a global presence, this also comes with the opportunity for trilateral cooperation, particularly mentioning Africa as one of the regions where this could be possible (European Commission & EEAS, 2019, p. 4). At the same time, this trilateral cooperation would materialise with the EU upholding its core values, among which good governance stands out in contrast to China's non-interference policy. Moreover, by declaring China as essentially a developed country, Stahl's interpretation of the concept of trilateral development cooperation would no longer be valid, as it is to be conducted between two actors from developing countries converging with an actor from a developed country.

Then it would be more pertinent to speak only of trilateral cooperation rather than TDC, as the notion of NSC (EU)-SSC (China)-SSC (Africa) cooperation could be argued to prove invalid. Particularly as the EU considers China to no longer be a developing country. Thus having two powerful actors, the EU and China, in cooperation with a third actor, Africa, that represents an entire continent, could be an example of neoliberal institutionalist interaction via multiple channels and with a variety of actors in the modern era of globalization and multipolarity.

So, as most of the analysed EU strategy papers declare that the world is increasingly globalized, the EU is through its Africa and China strategy papers attempting to adapt to the interdependence that arises with an accelerated globalization. Furthermore, as the EU

acknowledges China as a force to be reckoned with, even more so an aspiring global power, the EU is attempting to navigate through a multipolar world with one step forward, one step backwards, and so forth. The EU needs China to remain an important global entity in matters of trade, but it also admonishes China for not adhering to the international regime of human rights and democracy. Similarly, the EU needs migration management as a key part in its relationship with Africa, so through the neoliberal institutionalist notions of negotiation and bargaining in a relationship of cooperation, the EU is highlighting Africa as a vital partner and neighbour and thusly offers what Africa has already received from China – enhanced trade and economic interdependence.

The partnership “should be based on a clear understanding of our respective and mutual interests and responsibilities”, wherein the EU pledges that both actors will adhere to the rules and norms of the international regime, such as human rights, democracy, rule of law and multilateralism (European Commission & EEAS, 2020, p. 1). The EU also highlights cooperation with Africa within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, a concrete example of how the notion of neoliberal institutionalist cooperation can take place by adhering to a globally established set of goals for all actors, no matter their status as developed or developing or emerging.

The proposed comprehensive strategy with Africa along with the Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs demonstrate a way in which the EU is attempting to adjust its policies so as to better deal with the changing world system structure. The March 2020 proposed strategy also aims to be more politically ambitious in nature. In the proposed strengthening of the EU-Africa relationship, the EU pledges for both actors to align their policies where there is mutual interest as partners on a global level and in multilateral fora as the UN and the WTO. Furthermore, the EU highlights the role of the AU, and how the EU and the AU together must act in preserving the fundamental freedoms and values. In addition, the EU pledges to help the AU gain an “enhanced observer status in the WTO” as well as “a stronger voice to Africa in the UN, international financial institutions and other multilateral organisations” (European Commission & EEAS, 2020, p. 16).

These are pledges that China does not provide to Africa, with its policy of non-interference or “no strings attached”. The EU’s one step forward, one step backwards, is a manner in which it takes one step forward in offering Africa what China cannot give, while at the same time taking one step backwards in offering Africa what China has already provided in the form of massive investments and inclusion of the private sector. According to neoliberal institutionalism, the EU is considering coordinating some of its policies with those of Africa, as these have benefitted Africa greatly in its relations with China. The prospect of absolute gains is from the EU’s perspective in

the sense that Africa will through this comprehensive strategic partnership emerge as a stronger actor in the international arena, both economically and politically. At the same time, this could be a way in which the EU prepares for a future trilateral cooperation with Africa and China, by in a way sending a signal to China that both EU and Chinese policies are in combination what would benefit all three actors the most.

Therefore, considering the fact that this new comprehensive strategic partnership with Africa has been one of the cornerstones of the new European Commission, and taking into account that from the EU's side there is a willingness to strengthen Africa's position in the international arena, it seems to be both a proactive as well as a reactive tool to address China's engagement in Africa. It is proactive because it seeks to render Africa a more equal partner that gains a stronger global voice, and in order to do so Africa must adhere to the international regime as established by, for example, the UN and the WTO. It is reactive because this could result – if African leaders agree to the terms of the partnership – in Africa becoming a closer partner to the EU in a possible future trilateral cooperation with China. Thus the EU could be hoping to draw China closer to its values and norms through cooperation with a third actor that both the EU and China deem essential for their respective prosperity. China is only mentioned once in this communication, in the context of the EU being the largest investor in Africa, putting it “well ahead” of China, among others (European Commission & EEAS, 2020, p. 6). However, considering the potential political implications of a comprehensive strategic EU-Africa partnership for a future trilateral cooperation between the EU, China and Africa, it can be argued that China's engagement in Africa has affected the EU's proposed comprehensive strategic partnership with Africa to a large extent.

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## 5 Conclusion

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There is little doubt that the global order is in a state of change and transition with the decline of bipolarity and the rise of multipolarity where emerging actors like China have a bigger impact politically and economically, both directly as well as indirectly. The EU finds itself in a hot spot where it must adapt its policies in order to maintain its role as a strong supporter of the international regime. The new European Commission has vowed to establish a more ambitious strategic partnership between the EU and Africa where cooperation is based on mutual benefits, both political and economic. At the same time, the EU wishes to also find areas where it can attract China to work together for a common objective, one of these areas being Africa.

Neoliberal institutionalism has been applied as the EU was the main unit of analysis, and as it is a supranational institution it perfectly embodies the theory in practice through concepts such as cooperation, economic interdependence and the institution as a forum where multiple actors with a common goal can attain absolute gains. In addition, the EU fashioning itself as a champion of the multilateral rules-based order considers that it is for the benefit of both the EU and Africa to strengthen their partnership that has evolved through development cooperation over the course of the past sixty years since the Treaty of Rome. At the same time, China, too, has experienced a long history in its development activities in Africa, but founded through different historical circumstances. While the EU must ensure that its member states' colonial past in the relationship with Africa is indeed a thing of the past, China's development relationship with Africa began as a united protest against colonialism.

The EU has historically had the upper hand in an asymmetric interdependence with Africa through a traditional donor-recipient relationship. China, on the other hand, emerging from a status as developing country investing in other developing countries for mutual benefits has set a more difficult stage for the EU in its relations with Africa. The EU today considers China to no longer be a developing country and therefore China must assume the same responsibilities as the EU in the context of the international regime that emphasises the rule of law, democracy, good governance and human rights, among others. However, the EU and China also need cooperation as they are in a state of economic interdependence, thus China's activities in Africa have been a wake-up call for the EU. Africa is deemed more important than ever and the EU has adjusted its policies for better alignment with China's Africa policy, where private investment and a trade-focussed approach has proven successful in gaining influence in the African content. The EU wants to maintain the current international regime, but it also needs to stay afloat and in tune with the current times. Therefore, it can be argued that the EU's proposed comprehensive strategic

partnership with Africa has been affected by China's engagement in Africa to a large extent, in that the proposed new partnership with Africa intends to strengthen and coordinate the policies and the political ties between the EU and Africa, in order to enable the EU to successfully negotiate a potential future trilateral cooperation with China and Africa, where the EU has the support of African leaders in maintaining the international regime when bargaining with China.

Through the six key EU documents that have been analysed for this thesis, it is clear that the EU knows that China is here to stay, in Africa and in the international arena. As the EU is essentially a neoliberal institutionalist creation, it is in its best interest to strengthen its cooperation with China. The EU wants to define China's position in the international system, hence why it simultaneously deems China a cooperation partner, a negotiating partner, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival. China is challenging the EU's traditional way of navigating in the international system by combining elements of economic interdependence with its own policies of non-interference wherein the neoliberal institutionalist regime with the rule of law, good governance, democracy and human rights are not conditions for cooperation.

It remains to be seen what the future holds for the EU in its relations with China and Africa. The regular EU-China summits will continue as will the regular EU-Africa/AU summits, but the question is whether the proposal of regular trilateral meetings with EU, African and Chinese leaders as proposed by the 2008 European Commission communication will ever materialise. If the EU truly considers the voice of Africa to be of equal importance to its own as well as the mutual benefits that cooperation with Africa and China would provide, it could then be argued that setting up a forum for trilateral cooperation between the EU, Africa and China could result in a more symmetric interdependence relationship between all three actors.

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