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SINO-MOROCCAN RELATIONS

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

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

- On the political level, cooperation between Morocco and China is marked by a convergence of points of view at both bilateral and multilateral levels, for instance with regard to the issue of territorial integrity.
- On global issues, the two countries have in common their commitment to the crucial challenges facing humanity and their involvement in cross-cutting issues such as peacekeeping, migration, climate change, ... Over the past few years, Morocco has distinguished itself in the fight against the effects of climate change. Besides organizing COP22, Morocco hosted the first African Summit of Action and launched the Triple A initiative, aimed at adapting African agriculture to the challenge of climate change. At the same time, the Kingdom has implemented an ambitious renewable energy program. China, for its part, has initiated several successful initiatives that have enabled it to durably reduce its carbon dioxide emissions. Both countries also have a clear willingness to share their experiences with partner countries. This is true of Morocco in Africa and of China with developing countries.
- Morocco has attracted major Chinese companies (BAW, BYD, Haite Group, ZTE, Citic Dicastal...) thanks to its political stability and its economic attractiveness. These firms accompany the transformation of the Moroccan economy towards growth sectors where China has accumulated significant experience, in particular the automotive, aeronautics and digitalization sectors.
- China is Morocco's third largest trading partner with an overall trade volume of 4 billion dollars with an annual average growth of +18.2% between 2001 and 2016.

- Tourism also has great potential for cooperation. The removal in 2016, of entry visas for Chinese citizens has boosted trade and doubled the number of Chinese tourists visiting Morocco between 2016 and 2017.

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

A new milestone in bilateral relations between the Kingdom and China and in triangular relations between China-Morocco-Africa and China-Morocco-Europe was Morocco's endorsement at the end of 2017 to the Memorandum of Understanding on the Belt and Road Initiative. Indeed, the Kingdom of Morocco has shown its willingness to actively participate in the construction of this great project and to make use of its many assets so that this project, which is consistent with the "win-win" approach advocated by His Majesty King Mohammed VI, can contribute to the development of the African continent.

Africa could play key roles in the New Silk Road:

- Geographically: Africa is an inevitable part of the logistic network of the Belt and Road, being at the crossroads between Asia and Europe, the Indian and the Atlantic Oceans, the Red and the Mediterranean Seas.
- Economically: Africa's need for infrastructures good roads, railways, dams and schools, matches with the priorities settled by the creators of the Belt and Road initiative.
- Culturally: Africa is an ideal partner in promoting cultural diversity and civilizational dialogue.

In particular, with its diversifying economy, modern infrastructure (Tanger Med Port, airports, highways, High-speed train...) and the wealth and quality of its partnerships with Europe and the United States, Morocco as a regional hub could play an active role in the deployment of the New Silk Road. Furthermore, thanks to their extensive experience in African markets, Moroccan companies are partners of choice for Chinese companies wishing to expand on the African continent. In addition, the reputation of the Kingdom of Morocco, its cultural and spiritual influence and its thousand-year-old ties with the peoples of Africa are an undeniable asset and offer important prospects for this great project.

To sum up, relying on Morocco's dedication for African prosperity and for the future of humankind, the New Silk Road could be a historical opportunity for Africa to achieve autonomous, sustainable and rapid development. The Kingdom of Morocco have a potential role by ensuring the New Silk and Road Project matches with African autonomous development goals and principles as well as with the African Union 2063 agenda.