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DRAFT REPORT

on Connectivity and EU-Asia relations
2020/2115(INI)),

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rapporteur: Reinhard Bütikofer

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on Connectivity and EU-Asia relations

2020/2115(INI)),

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Rule 54 (and Rule 142(2)) of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the opinion of the Committee on International Trade and the Committee on Transport and Tourism,
- having regard to the Global Security Strategy for the European Union's Global Strategy of 28 June 2016,
- having regard to the Joint Communication from the EU Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 19 September 2018 on Connecting Europe and Asia - Building blocks for an EU Strategy,
- having regard to the Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure between the European Union and Japan of 27 September 2019,
- having regard to the Joint EU-US statement on the Asia-Pacific region of 12 July 2012,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 28 May 2018 on Enhanced EU Security Cooperation in and with Asia,
- having regard to the Joint Communication of 15 May 2019 on the EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership,
- having regard to the Joint Communication of 9 March 2020 Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa,
- having regard to the Joint Communication of 16 April 2019 on European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean: joining forces for a common future,

- having regard to the Joint Communication of 18 March 2020 on Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 reinforcing resilience - an Eastern Partnership that delivers to all,
 - having regard to the Joint Communication of 6 October 2020 on an Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans,
 - having regard to the Commission Communication Support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery - Commission contribution ahead of the EU-Western Balkans leaders meeting on 6 May 2020, of 29 April 2020,
 - having regard to the Connectivity Agenda for the Western Balkans adopted in 2015,
 - having regard to the Joint Communication of 7 June 2017 on a Strategic Approach to Resilience,
 - having regard to the Joint Communication of 29 January 2020 on Secure 5G deployment in the EU - implementing the EU toolbox,
- A. whereas an expanded global connectivity strategy for the EU needs effective governance and broad involvement of Member States as well as economic and societal stakeholders to effectively represent the EU's fundamental values and its shared interests;
- B. whereas a global connectivity strategy should serve the goals of the EU's key policies such as the European Green Deal, the Digital Transformation and the global promotion of human rights; whereas it should be built on Europe's strength in trade policy and address newly urgent challenges such as global health and security;
- C. whereas the EU-Japan connectivity partnership of 2019 gave additional relevancy to this strategy; whereas partnerships with other Asian partners should be established; whereas Africa should be designated a connectivity priority region as much as Asia;
- D. whereas a global connectivity strategy should be included in the Commission Work

Programme for 2021;

Principles of the Connectivity Strategy

1. Highlights that connectivity as a fundamental orientation of the European Union is deeply engrained in the EU's approach to domestic and international challenges; proudly points out that connectivity policies have been implemented successfully in many of the EU's external relations; encourages Commission and EEAS to create a Global EU Connectivity Strategy (the Strategy) as an extension of the present EU-Asia connectivity strategy in order to align our connectivity philosophy and our connectivity policies with the goal of strengthening the EU's role as a true geo-political and geo-economic actor;
2. Expects the Strategy to contribute to realizing the EU's main framework policies of building a strong and fair union, of investing in peaceful international relations, of realizing economic progress on the basis of the European Green Deal and the Digital Transformation and of promoting global justice;
3. Is of the view that the Strategy must comprehensively address a broad spectrum of political, economic, cultural, sustainability and security dimensions based on the EU's fundamental values and its shared interests; insists that the values of freedom, human rights, rule of law, democracy, solidarity, sustainability, inclusiveness, transparency, reciprocity and the adherence to multilateralism shall guide the Strategy;
4. Invites economic and societal stakeholders on the EU level and in the Member States to participate in the development of the Strategy;
5. Recalls that, in order to generate sustainable growth and jobs, connectivity investments need to respect the public good, market efficiency and fiscal viability while avoiding debt entrapment; highlights that such investments need to support economic resilience and decarbonisation of the economy and respect high environmental and biodiversity standards; stresses that they need to adhere to high standards of social and labour rights, transparency, human rights, due diligence, and good governance and give a voice to the people affected by the projects;

6. Gives greatest emphasis to the need for a fair partnership with respective countries; the Strategy must create shared benefits, prevent one-sided dependencies or debt traps, empower self-determination and be conducted with mutual respect;

Governance of the Strategy

7. Stresses that the Strategy must be coordinated with the pursuit of internal connectivity within the EU;
8. Underlines the multidimensional nature of the Strategy which requires effective coordination of those strategies, policies and projects for international connectivity which already exist;
9. Proposes that the Strategy be discussed regularly by the Commissioners' Group for a Stronger Europe as Connectivity Coordination Body, co-chaired by the VP/HR and a Commission Connectivity Coordinator, ideally an Executive Vice-President;
10. Takes the view that the creation of a dedicated Council Working Group could enhance connectivity coherence and ownership among Member States;
11. Believes that the inclusion of relevant stakeholders is essential for the success of the strategy; recommends the creation of a High-Level Expert Group as an advisory body on international connectivity including business representatives, human rights, environmental and labour rights advocates, and IFIs;
12. Strongly believes that European development banks should play a central role in managing investment into international connectivity projects in particular with regard to the mobilisation of private sector investment;

Priorities of the Strategy

Green transition

13. Believes that the fight against climate change, for the decarbonisation of economies, for the preservation of biodiversity and the environment should be an overarching priority of the Strategy in particular with regard to infrastructure development; calls for a systemic greening of all connectivity investments; gives high priority to the greening of development cooperation, of infrastructure investment across the board and in particular of the energy dimension;

Digital Transformation

14. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to step up ambition regarding digital transformation; expects the EU to become a competitive global actor in digitisation at par with the US and China; considers in this context the promotion of digital connectivity as a high priority for the EU; holds that the development of open strategic autonomy in this sector must include digitisation partnerships with third countries; underlines that the EU should aim at offering co-leadership in setting and defending international standards and practices;

People-to-People

15. Believes that the people-to-people dimension is a fundamental pillar of the Strategy requiring further prioritisation; puts great emphasis on the promotion of people-to-people contacts amongst students, vocational trainees, young professionals, academics and researchers as key to mutual understanding and respect; advocates such cooperation based on inclusiveness; calls in particular for the strengthening of the youth dimension through youth fora, for mutual promotion of foreign language proficiency, of student and academic exchanges and of the mutual recognition of diplomas;

16. Commends the initiatives adopted for the Western Balkans aiming at youth cooperation and exchange as well as vocational education and training and encourages offering similar programmes to other partners of the connectivity strategy, starting with the Eastern Partnership countries;

Trade, Investment and Standards

17. Highlights the importance of trade and investment in achieving the objectives of the Strategy; emphasizes in this context in particular the role of international norms and standards; is of the view that the EU model of standardization policy has the advantage of being innovative, open and inclusive and must be enabled to continue coping with the global competition between different paradigms in standardization; emphasizes in this context the need to prevent an authoritarian bend in future standardization for ICT and the internet of things;

Health

18. Believes that the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the urgency of prioritizing the health sector as a new crucial area for cooperation, in particular with regard to the resilience of health systems, access to medicines, medical equipment and vaccines, avoiding one-sided dependencies, ensuring safe and diverse pharmaceutical and health-related industrial supply chains, exchange of best practices in crisis management and pandemic prevention policies;

Security

19. Is convinced that the security dimension of the Strategy must be developed with urgency in order for the EU to keep abreast of new security challenges; highlights emanating security concerns in the EU's Eastern and Southern Neighborhood; urges the EEAS and the Member States to play a more proactive role in these regards;

Connectivity partnerships

20. Strongly welcomes the establishment of the EU-Japan Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure with its focus on the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Indo-Pacific and Africa; applauds Japan for pro-actively proposing practical steps to realize the agreed ambition; hopes that the EU and Japan will manage to kick-start the operationalisation of the partnership in the first half of 2021;
21. Strongly welcomes ongoing negotiations over building a connectivity partnership with India; hopes that the rotating EU Council presidencies as well as the subsequent G20 presidencies of Italy and India will use their respective leverage to move forward; also

welcomes the EU-Korean explorative exchanges on a connectivity partnership and hopes it will be making good headway in 2021; advocates for the establishment of an EU-ASEAN connectivity partnership aiming at interconnecting with ASEAN's already existing Connectivity Master Plan and project pipeline;

22. Welcomes the general principles of the Blue Dot Network (BDN) concept initiated by the United States; calls on Commission and EEAS to engage with BDN without yet endorsing it as long as sustainability concerns are unresolved;

23. Is willing to consider also partnering with the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative in specific cases where this does not compromise core EU principles;

24. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to develop strong monitoring capabilities of other countries' connectivity strategies, including the financial resources actually deployed;

Global Connectivity

25. Strongly emphasizes that the Global EU Connectivity Strategy must give particular attention to connectivity with the African neighbor continent; expects that this effort should integrate the EU experience with connectivity promoting policies implemented vis-à-vis Africa through development cooperation; advocates that this goal should be discussed at a high level with the African Union and should result in an EU-Africa connectivity partnership by the end of 2021;

26. Expects the Commission to present a new communication approach with a clear narrative in order to create adequate visibility for EU connectivity policies and their results;

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27. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the President of the European Council, the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Member States, and the EU's Connectivity Partners.

