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Abstracts

Regional Autonomy, Great Power Games and the Regional Institutional Complexes

Ren Lin & Zhang Zunyue

Abstract: In recent years, the great power game has often been played out at the regional level as well. However, the institutional form within different regions have been affected differently, resulting in different types of regional institutional complexes, such as nested overlaps, parallel – like overlaps and multiple overlaps. By studying the cases of Western Europe, East Asia, Africa, and Latin America, we find that the main reasons for this are twofold: first, the great power game has different strategies for exerting influence in different regions, and the policy effects of both the economic and trade game as well as the institutions – establishment game are not the same; and second, the degree of autonomy varies from one region to another, which leads to different levels of perceptions of, and responses to, the great power game. To a certain extent, the great power game creates tensions in regional governance and increases the complexity of the regional institutional complex; while regional autonomy is the endogenous synergy that shapes the patterns of regional governance, and the region's own degree of autonomy becomes an important support for it to cope with internal and external shocks in the region. Under the combination of tensions and synergies, regions have bred different types of institutional complexes. The regional institutional complexes that have emerged from the inter – constructive process between big powers and the regions are giving birth to future models of regional governance that will provide an important complement to the established system of global governance.

Key words: global governance; regional governance; great power games; institutional complexes; regional integration organizations

The Trilemma of Security, Sovereignty and Democracy: Analyzing the Structural Tensions in the Withdrawal of Three Sahel Countries from ECOWAS

He Yang

Abstract: The collective withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger from

ECOWAS reflects structural challenges facing Africa's regional governance mechanisms. Despite growing research on interactions between ECOWAS and military governments, existing studies often focus on single dimension, failing to fully capture the complex dynamics behind the withdrawal decision. For a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, the security – sovereignty – democracy trilemma framework examines how these three interacting dimensions jointly shape regional governance tensions. This research finds that the withdrawal decision resulted from the interaction and reinforcement of multiple factors within the trilemma: first, ECOWAS's normative interventions based on democratic principles triggered strong sovereignty anxieties among member states; second, these sovereignty concerns exacerbated the fundamental ideological conflict between ECOWAS's 'democracy first' approach and the military governments' 'security first' priorities; subsequently, military governments successfully transformed these conflicts into sovereignty defense narratives, effectively mobilizing domestic political support. These three tensions formed a self – reinforcing cycle, ultimately leading to the withdrawal decision. Facing this trilemma, these three countries adopted collective action strategies that not only amplified their influence and dispersed risks, but also reshaped regional order through the establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States, demonstrating strategic choices available to weaker states within the trilemma context.

Key words: African regional organizations; Economic Community of West African States; Alliance of Sahel States; “security – sovereignty – democracy” trilemma

AfCFTA Protocol on Investment: Background, Features and Implications

Zhu Weidong

Abstract: The establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is an important step toward the economic integration in Africa. The legal framework of the AfCFTA includes many protocols such as those on trade, investment, intellectual property and competition policy, to promote the intra – African trade and investment. AfCFTA Protocol on Investment is one of the topics of the second phase of negotiation. The adoption of the Protocol on Investment can contribute to the integration of the investment laws among the AfCFTA member

states. Compared with other international investment legal documents, the Protocol on Investment covers a wide range of topics, especially the comprehensive and clear provisions on the right to regulate of the host state and the legal duties of the investors. The Protocol on Investment draws various inspirations from the latest development of different international investment legal documents and manifests such prominent features as the clear definition of some key concepts, the emphasis on its core sustainable development goal, the focus on the combination of the principle and exception, and the special concern on the balance of the right and duty. The Protocol on Investment provides a set of uniform and certain investment legal framework, extends the scope of the right to regulate, specifies the treatment standard of the investors, and in turn will facilitate the FDI flow among the AfCFTA member states, but on the other hand, it will bring pressures to the member states to implement it and will impose more burden on the investors. The Chinese investors should pay attention to the content of the Protocol on Investment and choose the appropriate investment channels when considering investing in Africa.

Key words: AfCFTA; Protocol on Investment; right to regulate; duty of the investors

The Construction of African Digital Trade Rules and China's Responses

Sun Zhina

Abstract: Digital trade is emerging as a new engine driving global economic and trade growth, following the footsteps of goods trade, service trade, and value chain trade. This has made the formulation of digital trade rules as the focal point of the current global digital trade governance game. Major economies in the world are actively competing for the right to formulate and dictate international digital trade rules through regional trade agreements they lead or participate in, introducing digital trade rules that align with their own interests. In Africa, most countries are also increasingly attaching importance to the construction of digital trade rules. They have not only formulated domestic laws and regulations related to digital trade, but also actively promoted digital trade governance at the continental and sub – regional levels. The Digital Trade Protocol under the framework of the African Continental Free Trade Area is the first agreement specifically targeting digital trade among

developing countries. It actively benchmarks high – standard international digital trade rules, exhibiting characteristics such as wide applicability, multiple coverage areas, high standard rules, as well as emphasis on public policy objectives and national security, which represents that Africa is constructing digital trade rules template that is in line with its own development. However, there are still some issues with the Digital Trade Protocol, such as topics that are not suitable for Africa’s current development level, risks of abuse of exception clauses, and uncertainties regarding subsequent implementation. As an important economic and trade partner of Africa, China can take measures to connect actively digital trade rules, establish institutional arrangements, and strengthen infrastructure cooperation to respond in the construction of African digital trade rules.

Key words: digital trade rule; Digital Trade Protocol; African template; AfCFTA

Historical Foundation, Practical Motivations and Path Choices of Türkiye’s Involvement in Solving Afghanistan Issues

Zhu Yongbiao, Zhang Yanwan & Lai Shiyu

Abstract: In 2021, the U. S. adjusted its policy towards Afghanistan, which is again facing a major change. In the face of the many variables brought about by the U. S. withdrawal, Türkiye, as an Islamic country in NATO, its role in Afghanistan issue is being re – examined. After more than 100 years of development, Türkiye and Afghanistan have close cultural and historical ties. Türkiye is not only attractive to Afghans, but also has experience in coordinating internal contradictions within Afghanistan and has close ties with various stakeholders. This gives Türkiye a certain advantage in its participation in solving Afghanistan issues. The impact and spillover of non – traditional security issues such as terrorism, drugs, and refugees in Afghanistan, and the position of Afghanistan in Türkiye’s overall foreign policy, enhance the need for Türkiye to further intervene in Afghanistan, and Türkiye’s good image and influence in Afghanistan also provide it with the possibility to intervene. Türkiye’s support to Afghanistan security affairs, participation in the institutionalization of Afghanistan construction, and promoting social and economic reconstruction in Afghanistan, also achieved certain results. However, to further participate in Afghanistan issues in the future, Türkiye will still face many

challenges, such as the constraints of its own internal problems, the imperfect cooperation mechanism, the influence of other major powers and the variables brought by Taliban's return to power.

Key words: Türkiye; Afghanistan issue; HoA – IP; Taliban; the United States

Italy's Africa Policy Adjustments and Prospects in the Context of "Enlarged Mediterranean"

Shi Dou & Sun Yanhong

Abstract: Since World War II, Italy's Africa policy has been an essential part of its Mediterranean policy, which revolves around the two pillars of Atlantic policy and European policy. Over the years, it has gone through three phases characterized by "losing Africa", "returning to Africa", and "heading South". In the past decade, Africa has become increasingly prominent in Italy's diplomatic agenda, and the "Enlarged Mediterranean" framework provides valuable insights into Italy's strategic adjustments towards Africa during this period. From the "Italy – Africa Initiative" in 2013 to the "Partnership with Africa" in 2020, Italy has sought to transcend the "Energy – Migration" framework that has characterized its cooperation with Africa, replacing it with an "equal partnership" framework focused on "Development – Governance". Against this backdrop, in 2024, Italy's Meloni government formally announced its latest aid program for Africa, the "Mattei Plan", which once again puts cooperation in the traditional fossil energy sector at the core of its strategy for Africa, seemingly turning back the clock. The future of the "Mattei Plan" faces significant challenges, including the security and governance issues of North African energy exporters and transit countries. Additionally, its success depends on the Italian government's ability to secure support from the European Union and the United States, and to convert the plan into tangible outcomes.

Key words: Italy – Africa relations; "Enlarged Mediterranean"; "Mattei Plan"; energy crisis; migration crisis

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