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A strategy for strengthening China's influence in African countries in the context of contemporary challenges and contradictions

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Abstract. This study analyzes the China's strategy for strengthening its influence in Africa amidst contemporary geopolitical challenges and intensifying global competition for resources and markets. The relevance of this study stems from Africa's rapid transformation into a center of global politics and economics, as well as the need for understanding of Beijing's new approaches to building long-term partnerships with African countries. The aim of this study is to identify key instruments and mechanisms of Chinese expansion in Africa, as well as to assess the evolution of China's strategy, and to outline the possibilities for adapting this experience to the foreign economic practice of the Russian Federation. The research methodology is based on a systemic and comparative analysis of official documents and statistical data, as well as scientific publications by Chinese and Russian researchers. The results of the study demonstrate that China is implementing a multi-vector strategy based on a symbiosis of investment, infrastructure projects, and soft power. The study reveals a shift in Chinese business perception of cooperation with African companies as a promising sales market and a platform for localizing high-tech production. The discussion emphasizes that China's declarations of non-interference in the affairs of African states conceal a profound systemic strategy that creates asymmetric interdependence. By implementing this policy, China is asserting its role not simply as an investor, but as the "architect" of the continent's key infrastructure and institutional systems. The conclusion summarizes that the study's uniqueness lies in its practical focus, as an analysis of Chinese experience allows us to identify effective investment and partnership models adapted to the local characteristics of Africa, which can be implemented in Russia's strategy for expanding its presence on the continent, which is particularly relevant for the development of cooperation in the agri-food sector.

Keywords: PRC, Russia, global South, cross-border collaboration, partnership frameworks, capital flows, Belt and Road Initiative, FOCAC, agribusiness

Contribution. All the authors participated in the development of the concept of this review, data collection, processing and analysis, drafted the manuscript, and formulated the conclusions.

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Стратегия укрепления влияния КНР в странах Африки в контексте современных вызовов и противоречий

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Аннотация. Предложен комплексный анализ стратегии Китайской Народной Республики по укреплению влияния в странах Африки в условиях современных геополитических вызовов и усиления глобальной конкуренции за ресурсы и рынки сбыта. Актуальность исследования обусловлена стремительной трансформацией Африки в один из центров мировой политики и экономики, а также необходимостью научного осмысления новых подходов Пекина к формированию долгосрочного партнерства с государствами континента. Цель исследования — выявить ключевые инструменты и механизмы китайской экспансии в Африке, а также оценить эволюцию стратегии КНР (от роли кредитора и инфраструктурного инвестора к статусу системного партнера, формирующего производственные цепочки и стандарты управления) и очертить возможности по адаптации данного опыта во внешнеэкономической практике Российской Федерации. Методология исследования базируется на комплексном подходе, включающем системный и сравнительный анализ официальных документов и статистических данных, а также научных публикаций китайских и российских исследователей. Результаты исследования показывают, что Китай реализует многосекторную стратегию, основанную на симбиозе инвестиций, инфраструктурных проектов и «мягкой силы». Выявлена трансформация восприятия китайским бизнесом сотрудничества с африканскими компаниями от ограниченного ресурсного партнерства к перспективному рынку сбыта и площадке для локализации высокотехнологичных производств. В обсуждении подчеркнуто, что за декларациями китайской стороны о невмешательстве в дела африканских государств просматривается глубокая системная стратегия, создающая асимметричную взаимозависимость. Вследствие реализации данного курса Китай утверждается в роли не просто инвестора, а «архитектора» ключевых инфраструктурных и институциональных систем континента. Заключение резюмирует, что уникальность исследования состоит в практической ориентированности, так как анализ китайского опыта позволяет выявить эффективные модели инвестирования и партнерства, адаптированные к локальным особенностям Африки, которые могут быть имплементированы в российскую стратегию расширения присутствия на континенте, что имеет особую актуальность для развития сотрудничества в агропродовольственном секторе.

Ключевые слова: Китай, Россия, глобальный Юг, межгосударственная кооперация, модели взаимодействия, инвестиции, инициатива, один пояс, один путь, FOCAC, агропромышленный комплекс

Вклад авторов. Все авторы участвовали в разработке концепции исследования, сборе, обработке и анализе данных, написании текста рукописи, формулировке выводов.

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Introduction

Africa is undergoing a period of rapid transformation, as demographic growth, urbanization, and growing political clout make it one of the most promising platforms for the global economy of the future. The relevance of this study is due to several factors. First, as Africa's largest trading partner for 16 years, China has demonstrated a unique expansion model based on a symbiosis of investments, infrastructure projects, and soft power. According to the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, by the end of 2024, the total investment volume of Chinese enterprises in Africa has reached significant values, and the jobs created and economic cooperation zones are radically changing the landscape of the continent [1–3]. Secondly, against the background of the global food crisis, China's experience in transforming Africa's agriculture, which accumulates Such practices as the creation of demonstration centers, the improvement of crop varieties, the construction of ports and roads are of particular value for scientific understanding [4]. Thirdly, the 360 billion yuan financial support package announced at the China-Africa Cooperation Forum (FOCAC) in 2024 and the transition to a new philosophy of six-in-one and five-out relations signal the transition of Sino-African relations to a qualitatively new level, which requires comprehensive conceptualization [5].

The analysis of Chinese experience in cooperation with African countries is of considerable scientific interest, as it allows us to identify effective investment and partnership models adapted to local peculiarities, which can be flexibly implemented in the future in the Russian foreign economic strategy. In addition, a comprehensive study of this experience will allow Russia, faced with sanctions pressure and the need to diversify its foreign economic relations, not only to avoid mistakes, but also to occupy its niche in the competition for African markets.

The aim of this study is a comprehensive analysis of China's strategy to strengthen its influence in Africa, identify key tools (economic, political, humanitarian) and assess the prospects for adapting this experience to build the strategy of the Russian Federation on the continent.

Materials and methods

The information base of the study is based on the analysis of official documents and materials, statistical data from the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, quantitative indicators of Boston University for lending to African countries, which allows us to detail the scale of China's investment presence in Africa. A significant number of sources are materials from Chinese economic publications, as well as scientific works by Chinese researchers that reveal the mechanisms for implementing the "One Belt, One Road" initiative and the results of the FOCAC 2024 Forum. Scientific works by Russian authors and data from specialized media were also used to compare and evaluate the prospects for adapting the Chinese experience within the framework of the Russian strategy for developing cooperation with the countries of the African continent, which forms a comprehensive source base for research.

The research methodology is based on an institutional approach, in which the Chinese strategy in Africa is considered as the formation of a new institutional environment that reduces transaction costs for Chinese businesses. The application of the theory of international political economy makes it possible to reveal the mechanisms of China's creation of added value through the integration of African resources into global production chains. This interdisciplinary approach makes it possible to outline the range of key Chinese instruments and mechanisms of economic expansion on the African continent, which are possible for further adaptation in the foreign economic practice of the Russian Federation.

Results

The results of the study China's projects on the African continent are based on infrastructural interconnectedness, industrial and technical cooperation, characterized by wide variability and complementarity of supply chains. Chinese enterprises operate in Africa in various fields, and their significant economic contribution to the African economy is already noticeable. According to the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, as of the end of 2024, the total value of Chinese investments in African infrastructure and trade cooperation is estimated at \$49.96 billion. The total amount of tax revenues paid by Chinese companies to African states reached \$3.04 billion, creating 73,000 direct jobs for the local population. The PRC has signed agreements on attracting and protecting investments with 34 African countries, of which working groups on investment and economic cooperation have been established with 14 states, which effectively contributes to the high-quality development of Sino-African investment cooperation [6].

Analyzing the activities of Chinese companies in Africa in the agro-industrial complex (AIC), first of all, it is worth paying attention to infrastructure and transport projects that will significantly optimize logistics in the future and contribute to the development of the AIC of the entire continent. The construction of ports, railways and aviation hubs within the framework of the Belt and Road initiative has not only significantly increased the level of regional connectivity on the African continent, but also opened up “two pulses” connecting Africa with the world. For example, the Mombasa-Nairobi railway has significantly increased the efficiency of cargo transportation in Kenyan ports, the Djibouti International Free Trade Area has become a logistics hub on the Red Sea coast, and the Abuja City Railway, the first electrified light rail in West Africa (the Blue Line), has changed the landscape of urban transport in Nigeria. China has also eliminated import duties for 53 African countries, creating a “green channel” for exporting local agricultural products to the Chinese food market. The implementation of this initiative contributes not only to reducing the trade costs of African agricultural enterprises, but also forms an effective mechanism for access of African food to international markets.

In turn, African countries are showing openness to cooperation with China and welcome projects that are part of the Belt and Road Initiative. As Chinese enterprises undertake a wide range of obligations for processing and exporting agricultural

products from partner countries, guaranteeing the supply of high-quality African agricultural products to Chinese and global consumers. The presented approach clearly reflects the synergy of the economic agents of the partner countries, in which each side receives the maximum possible benefits at each stage of cooperation.

A significant part of Chinese projects is being implemented through loans, thanks to which China has become the leading creditor of the continent. According to estimates by Boston University, from 2000 to 2023, Chinese lenders issued 1.3 thousand loans to African countries and regional organizations totaling 182.28 billion US dollars. The peak occurred in 2016, when the amount of loans reached \$28.8 billion¹. This approach has provided China with access to African energy resources and minerals, which has contributed to an increase in Chinese industrial capacity.

The Sino-African Cooperation Forum (FOCAC), established in 2000, is an effective platform for structuring and implementing cooperation between the parties. The forum is aimed not only at strengthening the economic, political and cultural influence of the PRC in Africa, but also at promoting the projects of the Chinese initiative “One Belt, One Road” [7].

When implementing economic cooperation and cooperation with African countries, China uses the concept of “mutually beneficial cooperation”, in which both sides receive significant benefits. The scale of these advantages is determined by the socio-economic development and the political platform of the partner countries. In particular, with regard to the PRC’s position, long-term and strategic benefits are in mind, while African countries are mainly interested in obtaining short-term economic and infrastructural advantages.

In 2024, during the China-Africa Cooperation Forum, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced 10 measures of the China-Africa partnership, planned to be implemented from 2025 to 2027 and aimed at modernizing and deepening China-Africa cooperation in various fields:

1. Exchange of experience: creation of a “platform” for the exchange of experience in the field of management of Sino-African relations, organization of visits of 1,000 African political parties to China in order to exchange experience in the management of party organizations and the state;
2. Mutual trade: the Chinese side unilaterally intends to provide duty-free tariff regime for all categories of goods supplied from 33 African countries;
3. Industrial cooperation: the formation of programs that provide additional rights and opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises in Africa, as well as the construction of a Sino-African cooperation center in the field of digital technologies;
4. Strengthening of relations between China and African countries within the framework of the “One Belt, One Road” initiative: China’s support for the development of the African Continental Free Trade Area, strengthening logistical

¹ Ray R, Gallagher KP, Krings W. Relative Risk and the Rate of Return: Chinese Loans to Africa Database, 2000–2023. *Boston University Global Development Policy Center*. Boston, 21 August 2024. URL: <https://www.bu.edu/gdp/2024/08/21/relative-risk-and-the-rate-of-return-chinese-loans-to-africa-database-2000-2023/> (accessed: 08.11.2025).

and financial cooperation between China and African countries, and promoting the interregional development of the African continent;

5. Overall strengthening of cooperation: China and African countries are ready to jointly make a statement on strengthening cooperation within the framework of The Global Development Initiative and implement 1,000 such projects, such as the 2026 Youth Olympic Games and the 2027 African Cup of Nations;

6. Healthcare: establishment of the Sino-African Medical Alliance, construction of a joint medical center. As part of efforts to strengthen cooperation in the healthcare sector, China has deployed 2,000 medical staff to Africa and implemented 20 medical and antimalarial projects. China encourages Chinese companies to invest in the production of medicines and continues to provide support in the fight against epidemics in Africa. One of the main objectives of the alliance is to establish an African Center for Disease Control and Prevention in order to modernize the health systems of African countries;

7. Agriculture: provision of emergency food aid to African countries with a total value of 1 billion yuan, construction of a demonstration zone for standardization of agro-industrial products with an area of approximately 6,700 hectares, delegation of 500 agricultural experts from China to African countries in order to establish a Sino-African Agricultural Union (scientific and technological cooperation);

8. Strengthening cooperation in the scientific and educational cluster: the Future of African Vocational Education program, joint construction of engineering and technology colleges, provision of 60,000 educational places for women and youth in African countries. An additional area of cooperation will be the joint implementation of the Chinese-African Cultural Silk Road and Radio and Television Innovation Cooperation projects;

9. “Green development”: China aims to implement 30 clean energy projects in Africa, create a business platform for early warning of meteorological disasters, build cooperation in the field of disaster prevention, mitigation and assistance, as well as conservation of biodiversity. The China-Africa Forum on the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Technologies has been established, as well as 30 joint laboratories for cooperation in the field of satellite remote sensing of the Earth and space research;

10. Global security: China is interested in creating a demonstration zone for joint work with African states in the framework of ensuring global security, and also intends to provide free military assistance to African countries in the amount of 1 billion yuan for the training of African young officers, including the organization of joint exercises. This approach has provided China with access to African energy resources and minerals, which has contributed to an increase in Chinese industrial capacity.

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In 2024, during the China-Africa Cooperation Forum, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced 10 measures of the China-Africa partnership, planned to be implemented from 2025 to 2027 and aimed at modernizing and deepening China-Africa cooperation in various fields.:

1. Education: creation of a “platform” for the exchange of experience in the field of management of Sino-African relations, organization of visits of 1,000 African political parties to China in order to exchange experience in the management of party organizations and the state;

2. Mutual trade: the Chinese side unilaterally intends to provide duty-free tariff regime for all categories of goods supplied from 33 African countries;

3. Industrial cooperation: the formation of programs that provide additional rights and opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises in Africa, as well as the construction of a Sino-African cooperation center in the field of digital technologies;

4. Strengthening of relations between China and African countries within the framework of the “One Belt, One Road” initiative: China’s support for the development of the African Continental Free Trade Area, strengthening logistical and financial cooperation between China and African countries, and promoting the interregional development of the African continent;

5. Overall strengthening of cooperation: China and African countries are ready to jointly make a statement on strengthening cooperation within the framework of The Global Development Initiative and implement 1,000 such projects, such as the 2026 Youth Olympic Games and the 2027 African Cup of Nations;

6. Healthcare: establishment of the Sino-African Medical Alliance, construction of a joint medical center. As part of efforts to strengthen cooperation in the healthcare sector, China has deployed 2,000 medical staff to Africa and implemented 20 medical and antimalarial projects. China encourages Chinese companies to invest in the production of medicines and continues to provide support in the fight against epidemics in Africa. One of the main objectives of the alliance is to establish an African Center for Disease Control and Prevention in order to modernize the health systems of African countries;

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10. Global security: China is interested in creating a demonstration zone for joint work with African states in the framework of ensuring global security, and also intends to provide free military assistance to African countries in the amount of 1 billion yuan for the training of African young officers, including the organization of joint exercises².

It is important to note that despite the scale of China’s economic expansion into African countries, the Chinese leadership emphasizes the democratic nature of this cooperation and the course towards preserving the sovereignty of partner states, which is reflected in the concept of the “five no’s” of China’s presence in Africa.:

1. Not to interfere with the aspirations of African countries to pursue a development path that meets their national conditions;
2. Not to interfere in internal affairs;
3. Do not impose your will;
4. There is no political link to aid to Africa;
5. There is no desire for selfish political benefits in investments and financing in cooperation with Africa [2].

The principles announced by the PRC formally demonstrate deep respect for the sovereignty and independent development of African countries. The Chinese side positions itself as a partner that does not interfere in internal affairs, does not impose its will and avoids political conditions when providing assistance [3; 8]. The PRC’s approach compares favorably with the approaches of Western countries, which often associate cooperation with the demands of political reforms.

At the same time, the Chinese side’s declarations of non-interference reveal a comprehensive, multi-vector and long-term strategy aimed at systematically strengthening China’s influence on the African continent. A massive budget and a wide range of initiatives from trade and healthcare to security and space indicate not simple assistance, but a purposeful building of deep interdependence. The key instruments of Chinese influence are:

1. Economic and trade integration — unilateral duty-free regimes and negotiations on investment agreements bind African economies to the Chinese market, creating a long-term dependence on demand from China;

² China has demonstrated an attraction of unprecedented generosity. *Kommersant* 06.09.2024. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6946789> (accessed: 25.09.2025). (In Russ.).

2. The creation of institutional and infrastructural links — the construction of cooperation centers (digital, medical, agricultural), the development of the African Continental Free Trade Area and logistics corridors consolidate China's role as the “architect” of the continent's key systems;

3. Ideological and personnel cooperation — training programs for thousands of African officials, party leaders and officers, as well as the creation of platforms for the exchange of management experience are a tool of soft influence, forming an elite loyal to Chinese approaches;

4. Security — the provision of military assistance, joint exercises and security programs take Sino-African cooperation beyond the purely economic framework, which is a classic attribute of strategic partnership.

Sino-African cooperation is widely represented by projects that have already been implemented, and a large number of new projects that are under implementation. The first results of the implementation of these initiatives became most noticeable after the launch of the Chinese “One Belt, One Road” initiative in 2013. As of 2023, China has built 6 thousand km of railways, 6 thousand km of highways and 20 ports in Africa [4]. In addition to infrastructure projects, China is actively promoting a number of technologies and innovations in the field of green energy in Africa, such as hydropower, wind energy, solar energy and geothermal energy. The construction of this infrastructure expands the access of African enterprises to energy supply, increases production efficiency and supply chains on the continent, creating new opportunities for access of African goods to the main and promising markets, which contributes to the coordinated development of infrastructure and industry [4; 9].

Based on the needs of common development, China and Africa have not only achieved effective complementarity of resource reserves, but also created a new paradigm of knowledge exchange and technology transfer. This model of cooperation can be described as follows: “Chinese technologies + African resources”. This approach continuously contributes to the coordinated modernization of the industrial chains of African States through the integration of Chinese and African production and logistics chains.

Despite the wide range of joint initiatives, it should be noted that African countries are primarily interested in strengthening food security and modernizing their agriculture. The African continent is characterized by the presence of significant agricultural resources, but there are also factors that seriously limit their rational use, such as lack of access to modern technologies, lack of monetary resources, weak infrastructure and lack of stable developed production chains, which prevents the increase in the level of self-sufficiency of the African population with food. Thanks to cooperation with major powers such as China, African states can gain access to humanitarian food aid [10], significantly develop their own production, build modern supply chains, gradually reducing dependence on food imports by creating a sustainable agricultural ecosystem.

The Russian Federation also attaches great importance to cooperation with African countries, one of the priorities of which is joint projects in the agricultural sector. This area seems to be the most promising, as more than 1.5 billion people

live in Africa, and the continent's population is increasing every year. According to expert estimates, the population of Africa increased by more than 37 million people in 2025. African countries spend more than \$85 billion a year on food imports, and wheat imports account for 15 % of this amount³.

Russian companies are actively working to increase grain supplies to African markets. In particular, by the end of 2023, Russia supplied agricultural products worth a total of \$6 billion to 43 African countries. The largest position of the Russian export portfolio in the region is grain crops. According to the results of the period under review, about 17.6 million tons of wheat were shipped, which is 60 % higher than the same indicator in 2022. Exports of Russian barley to Africa increased 2.8 times, corn — 2.3 times⁴.

According to FGBI Agroexport, Russia's relations with African countries have significant potential, in particular, in increasing the supply of Russian meat, dairy, fish and other products. Thus, exports of Russian poultry meat to Africa have increased almost 6 times in physical terms over the past 5 years. Russian dairy products are also beginning to conquer the African market⁵. Its largest buyer is Algeria, to whose territory Russia is actively increasing the supply of powdered milk. Bryansk Cheese Factory was one of the first producers to enter the Algerian market. The company plans to export other categories of Russian food products to Algeria under its umbrella brand⁶. In addition to humanitarian and trade cooperation, Russia provides assistance in the training of agricultural personnel and carries out humanitarian food supplies to the African continent.

Discussion

The results obtained confirm the conclusions of a number of researchers about the multicomponent nature of the Chinese strategy in Africa, combining investments, infrastructure projects and “soft power” tools [3, 8, 9]. At the same time, the analysis allows us to deepen our understanding of the evolution of this strategy: from the role of the largest lender and infrastructure investor to the status of a system partner that forms not only production chains, but also management standards [4, 6, 7, 9], and the emphasis on the practical significance of the findings for building a Russian strategy in the agro-industrial complex

³ Harnessing Africa's Demographic Dividend: Opportunities and Emerging Challenges for Economic Transformation. *African Center for Economic Transformation*. Accra, 2 September 2025. URL: (accessed: 08.11.2025).

⁴ Migunov D. Growing with Africa: Russian Wheat Conquers the Dark Continent. *Izvestia*. January 25, 2025. URL: <https://iz.ru/1826160/dmitrii-migunov/prirastaa-afrikoi-psenica-iz-rossii-zavoevala-cernyi-kontinent> (accessed: 08.11.2025). (In Russ.).

⁵ The most promising African countries for Russian agroexport are named. *Pole.rf*. 11.11.2024. URL: <https://xn--elalid.xn--plai/journal/publication/nazvany-naibolee-perspektivnye-dlya-rossiyskogo-agroeksporta-afrikanskije-strany> (accessed: 08.11.2025). (In Russ.).

⁶ Bryansk Cheese Factory has started supplying powdered milk to Algeria. *DairyNews*. 19.09.2024. URL: https://dairynews.ru/news/bryanskiy-syrodolnyy-zavod-nachal-postavki-sukhogo.html?sphrase_id=19913954 (accessed: 08.11.2025). (In Russ.).

determines the applied the value of the work [5]. The uniqueness of this study lies in the comprehensive consideration of Chinese expansion through the prism of the possibilities of adapting its tools for Russia, which allows not only to conceptualize the phenomenon of asymmetric interdependence in China's relations with African countries, but also to offer an analytical basis for developing practical recommendations for optimizing Russia's foreign economic policy on the continent.

Conclusion

Africa is a continent where the interests of all the leading world powers are intertwined today. Its rapid demographic growth, possession of significant amounts of key natural resources (from rare earth metals necessary for high technologies to hydrocarbons and uranium) and growing collective political weight make Africa one of the centers of world politics of the 21st century. The economies of African countries are showing some of the fastest growth rates in the world, which creates a market with enormous sales potential for non-primary Russian exports from mechanical engineering, agricultural machinery and energy equipment to educational and digital services. These factors increase the attractiveness of African countries for world economic leaders, including Russia.

Cooperation with African countries is not a charity or a return to the past, but a look into the future. Cooperation in this format is a strategic course aimed at strengthening Russia's economic sovereignty, expanding its foreign policy capabilities and creating new growth points. Missing this opportunity and refusing to actively participate in the process of Africa's transformation will strengthen the positions of our strategic competitors and narrow Russia's room for maneuver on the world stage.

China continues to work systematically within the framework of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, while forming effective mechanisms for managing its international investments. One of the key issues in relations with African countries remains their debt burden to China, which raises the issue of its restructuring. At the same time, significant economic dynamics is observed, with the growth rates of a number of African states steadily exceeding those of China. This circumstance contributes to the transformation of the approaches of Chinese investors, who are beginning to consider Africa not only as a resource base and a platform for infrastructure projects, but also as a promising sales market, as well as a profitable location for manufacturing. Formally respecting Africa's right for an independent path of development, China is pursuing an exceptionally pragmatic and persistent course to strengthen its influence. This course is based not on forceful pressure, but on creating a dense network of economic, infrastructural, technological and humanitarian ties that make China an indispensable partner. China's strategy is an example of modern neo-imperialism, where long-term influence is achieved not through direct subordination, but through mutually beneficial but asymmetric cooperation, where China ultimately occupies the position of a strategic center.

For other major world powers, including Russia, this means that Africa is becoming a space of not only economic, but also systemic competition, where

it is necessary to offer not only goods and investments, but also a holistic, attractive partnership model.

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