

Suggestions on Strengthening Policy Coordination in the Belt and Road Initiative

Liu Zhongmin, *Shanghai International Studies University*

I. The importance and current situation of policy coordination in the Belt and Road Initiative

Policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds between countries are the five cooperation priorities of the Belt and Road Initiative. Jointly issued by National Development and Reform Commission(NDRC), Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Commerce in March, the document ‘Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road’ points out that policy coordination is the important guarantee, infrastructure connectivity is the top priority, investment and trade cooperation is the major task, financial integration is the important underpinning and people-to-people bonds provides the public support for implementing the Initiative. Policy coordination mainly includes: to promote intergovernmental cooperation, build a multi-level intergovernmental macro policy exchange and communication mechanism, expand shared interests, enhance mutual political trust, and reach new cooperation consensus. Countries along the Belt and Road may fully coordinate their economic development strategies and policies, work out plans and measures for regional cooperation, negotiate to solve cooperation-related issues, and jointly provide policy support for the implementation of practical cooperation and large-scale projects. Among the five cooperation priorities, policy coordination provides strategic orientation and basic support, thus is of utmost significance. The rest are concrete means.

The performance and effectiveness of policy coordination is the key factor that determines the result of the Belt and Road Initiative. But the current situation is, whether in recognition or practice, emphasis on policy coordination is far less than on infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade and finance. At the present stage, some relevant countries fail to fully know and understand the Belt and Road Initiative, the result of which is some programs meet with setbacks in those counties. For example, Mexico canceled the contract for high-speed rail with Chinese company in 2014, halted the Chinese-funded project “Cancun Dragon Mart” in 2015; Sri Lankan government once stopped the Colombo port city project invested by Chinese enterprise in 2015; the new Greek

Liu Zhongmin, professor at the Middle East Institute, whose study focus on Middle East Politics, international political theory and international maritime problems.

Policy coordination plays an important role in the Belt and Road Initiative. Thus to better implement the Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese government should reinforce policy coordination with various measures and evaluate it with multiple mechanisms.

government suspended the privatization of Piraeus port involving Chinese investment in 2015. Though the causes are complicated, apparently deficiency on policy coordination between China and the rest countries is a major one.

II. Effectiveness and deficiencies of current policy coordination

In the past few years, Chinese central government has conducted intensive publicity and in-depth interpretation on the connotation and significance of the Belt and Road Initiative in relevant countries and regional organizations through exchange of high-level visits, interconnection partnership dialogues, endorsement of cooperation framework agreement, and platforms of multilateral mechanism and so on. It actively forge consensus and strives to coordinate the Belt and Road Initiative with the development strategies of relevant countries and regional organizations, as a result of which, certain progress has been made in the policy coordination of the Belt and Road Initiative. But on the whole, policy coordination between China and the rest countries and regions is far from enough.

At present, one of the major problems in policy coordination is that our knowledge of the development strategies of relevant countries and regions is rather superficial so the communication could not be accurately targeted. The reason for that bottleneck is a lack of talent, largely due to long-term improper international talent training mechanism under the current education system in China. In Chinese disciplinary system, foreign language disciplines are isolated from area and country study. As a consequence, personnel of political science, law and other social sciences don't know the language of the country they study on, or try to apply English to all countries, while, foreign language talents, especially non-general foreign language talents either take no interest in area and country study, or have very poor knowledge of humanities and social sciences.

III. Suggestions on strengthening policy coordination

Firstly, we should specially strengthen exchanges and cooperation with countries in the Middle East. Connecting Europe and Asia, Middle East is the pivot area in the Belt and Road Initiative. The president of China should conduct visits to countries in Middle East as soon as possible because exchange of high-level visits plays a leading role in policy coordination.

Secondly, we should practically fortify research and study on development strategies of relevant countries and regional organizations, enhance the effectiveness of policy coordination. The following work should be reinforced:

i). China Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Commerce and Xinhua News Agency should mobilize their foreign institutions and personnel to intensively carry out investigation and survey, gain basic knowledge of the development strategies of relevant countries and regions, and find out the right starting point for coordination and cooperation, so as to serve short-term national decision-making.

ii). Related state department takes the lead, together with relevant government departments, think tank and other research institutes to conduct continuous follow-up study, to collect, compile, organize and analyze documents concerning development strategies of relevant countries and regions, in order to grasp their current situation and development trend.

iii). We should fully mobilize local governments to strengthen policy coordination. Local governments and related departments and institutes should make use of their own traditional advantage and geographical advantage to carry out in-depth investigations on the development strategies of their neighboring countries, contiguous area and sub-area, play the leading role in policy coordination.

iv). We should internationalize the operation of our think tank. Through establishment of research institutions abroad, enhancement of international cooperative study, practically strengthen the role of think tank in promotion of policy coordination.

Thirdly, we should change the training mode of personnel on area and country study, to train and reserve a large number of talents for policy coordination. I suggest that a integrated personnel training platform be set up affiliating to the discipline of foreign languages or international relations, to focus on training comprehensive talents with good command of language of the target country and knowledge of humanities and social sciences. In the long term, we should draw on the experience of western countries in their construction of oriental studies; reform the disciplinary system of foreign language education, so as to develop it into an integrated discipline that combines foreign and regional studies.

Translator/ Zhao Chengmei

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