



Institutskolloquium / DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR

The empire strikes back, or at least it tries: The Global Gateway in Africa

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Room 124, Institut für Politikwissenschaft
Or join online via Zoom: zoom.us/j/93089750663
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Africa is firmly implicated in contemporary geoeconomics. Unable to contain 'systemic rivals' territorially in a hyper-globalised economy, major powers and their corporations now compete for control over global infrastructure, digital, production, trade and finance networks – the power arteries of the global political economy. The dominance of Chinese firms and banks in African infrastructure markets as well as of strategic value chains that originate in Africa has, in recent years, prompted Western reactions in the form of 'alternative' connectivity initiatives, such as the G7 Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment or the European Union's 'Global Gateway'.

Official narratives on the Global Gateway have framed the initiative as a sustainable, more transparent, as well as high-quality and value-driven, alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative. Informed by interviews with senior decision-makers and officials in Brussels, with European diplomats based in Tanzania as well as Tanzanian officials, this lecture traces the 'China factor' in the emergence of the Global Gateway initiative, documents its key instruments and priorities and problematises structural and institutional limitations and contradictions in its implementation across Africa.

Shifting the analytical focus towards African stakeholders, Tim Zajontz also shows how African governments and economic actors have pragmatically diversified their external and political linkages in what has been called polyalignment. The Global Gateway in Africa is thus informed by the dialectics of African agency and structural constraints arising from geostrategic efforts to lock African state-society complexes into new dependencies. Africa's centrality in Global Gateway programming aims at (re)integrating the continent into Europe-centric trade, infrastructure and production networks motivated by European interests to secure access to, among others, 'green' energy sources and 'critical minerals'. While being unprecedentedly open about its strategic interests, the EU has to manoeuvre an increasingly complex and competitive geopolitical environment in Africa, thereby being haunted by its colonial past and present.

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