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The Significance and Measures of Building the China—Mongolia—Russia Economic Corridor

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In September 2014, Chinese leaders introduced the initiative to build the China, Mongolia and Russia Economic Corridor during the SCO summit in Dushanbe. In March 2015, China issued *The prospect and action of promoting to build the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road*, which officially made building the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor a strategic support of the Belt and Road initiative. In July 2015, during the summit of the SCO and the BRICS in Ufa, Russia, the leaders of China, Mongolia and Russia signed the *China, Mongolia and Russia tripartite cooperation medium-term road map*, which marked the tripartite cooperation agreement between the countries. Less than a year had passed between the initiative of the China-Mongolia-Russia *Economic Corridor* and signing the *China, Mongolia and Russia tripartite cooperation medium-term road map*. This agreement clearly shows the economic corridor is the common choice for all three countries and the strategic choice which meets their interests.

1. Building the China—Mongolia—Russia Economic Corridor Is of Great Significance for All the Three Countries

The China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor is a transitional, cross-border international cooperation effort to make the Silk Road Economic Belt coincide with the initiative of the Russia trans-Eurasian Railway and the Mongolia Grassland Road, and another multilateral cooperation project launched in Northeast Asia. This is not

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only of great significance for the development of the individual projects but also of practical significance for interconnection and cooperation in Northeast Asia and East Asia.

First, the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor is the strategic choice for the three countries to expand their economies.

Since China's reform and opening-up, its economy has realized fast development. But in recent years, it has also faced the deep impact of the international financial crisis and the profound changes in domestic development conditions. The new leaders assessed the situation, integrated domestic and international politics and adopted the development strategy involving both inside and outside, creating a good internal and external environment for achieving the two one-hundred-year goals. The Belt and Road initiative was put forward in such a situation. Internally, China desired to build the strategic support driving the center region development. Externally, China, with neighboring countries and along the routes, needed to conform to the trends of the times; multipolarization, economic globalization, cultural diversity and social information expansion, and to determine the junction of Chinese and all parties' interests. The China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor is China's important international passage and necessary fulcrum to strengthen interconnections with Mongolia and Russia. It is beneficial to China's development, as well as a win-win situation for neighboring countries.

Russia made resource-rich Siberia and the Far East the main open area and made great efforts to strengthen cooperation with Asia-Pacific countries, to revive the domestic economy and reduce the gap between east and west. Thus, with its geographical advantages, Russia put forward the development thought of the Eurasian Railway Passage. This coincides with China's initiative to build the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor. At

present, China and Russia have reached several agreements regarding infrastructure construction and interconnections. The construction of high-speed rail from Moscow to Kazan has already been launched. Combined with China's rapid economic development, Russia will strengthen its revival which will create a win-win situation.

Mongolia is the active promoter of the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor. In August 2014, when President Xi Jinping visited Mongolia, the Mongolian President, Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj, proposed the initiative to create a Chinese, Mongolian and Russian dialogue mechanism. To consolidate the strategic ideas of China's Belt and Road and Russia's Eurasian Economic Union, the Mongolian President put forward the idea of constructing the Grassland Road, intending to restore the historical Mongolian trade routes. Mongolia hopes to be the channel of northeast Asia and even Eurasia, with the help of the influence and development engine of China and Russia in the Asia Pacific region.

Second, the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor is an exploration of creating a new mode of Northeast Asia regional cooperation.

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the ending of the Cold War, the world's political and economic structure has changed significantly. One obvious trend is economic development has turned to regionalization and integration. From bilateral economic cooperation to multilateral economic cooperation, the cross-district economic cooperation has mushroomed. But due to the different political systems in Northeast Asia, the level of economic development is uneven and there are many problems left over from history and other factors, and a systematic multilateral cooperation mode and mechanism has yet to be formed.

The total area of China, Mongolia and Russia makes up 51% of the Eurasian continent. The

population of the three countries accounts for 13%. The resources of the three countries possess almost all the strategic resources in the world. The characteristics of the human resources, technical resources and geographical features shared by China, Mongolia and Russia provide a solid material foundation for the cross-border cooperation through the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor.

The strategic partnership between the three countries is the important political guarantee for the trilateral economic cooperation. In July 2015, during the summit of the SCO and the BRICS in Ufa, Russia, the leaders of the three countries formulated the plan of long-term cooperation. Referring to the *China, Mongolia and Russia tripartite cooperation medium-term road map*, the trilateral negotiated mutually and implemented gradually to make the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor a new mode and mechanism of regional cooperation in Northeast Asia, which will surely fill the need for Northeast Asian multilateral cooperation.

Finally, the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor is the stabilizer and lubricant for the security of the Northeast Asian region.

In Northeast Asia, China, Russia and Mongolia are countries without any unresolved historical problems. In August 2009, Mongolia and Russia signed *The Declaration on developing strategic partnership*, moving the bilateral relations between Mongolia and Russia to a new level. In September 2010, China and Russia signed the *Joint statement on the comprehensive deepening strategic partnership*, raising the Sino-Russia relationship to a new height. In June 2011, China and Mongolia signed the *Joint statement on the establishment of strategic partnership*, achieving a new development in Sino-Mongolia cooperation. The stable and good relations among the three sides creates a good political atmosphere for Northeast Asia's stability, security and regional cooperation, and the important guarantee that

Northeast Asia regional cooperation will continue smoothly.

At present, the cooperation of China, Mongolia and Russia is almost of sufficient favorable conditions. To build the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor joins the wishes of the three countries and their people and is supported by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and Silk Road Fund providing financial support. So, under the guidance of the diplomatic principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness, the three countries can foster strengths and circumvent weaknesses and break the cooperation bottleneck, making this international cooperation much wider and smoother.

2. Actively Promote the Trilateral Cooperation with the Platform of the Belt and Road

Building the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor is a cross-border international cooperation involving the three countries. Although the social and political systems are different and the domestic economic development of each country has its own characteristics, there are favorable factors for cooperation and mutual benefits as well as obstacles. So, it requires clarifying the relations, finding the point of agreement, seeking common ground while preserving differences, and trying to add new contents to the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor cooperation and establish a new engine for economic development.

First, promote the interconnection and benefits for the people of the three countries.

The China, Mongolia and Russia tripartite cooperation medium-term road map is the end result of the combining of China's Silk Road Economic Belt, Russia's Trans Eurasian Railway and Mongolia's Grassland Road. It is also the blueprint

which embodies the common requirements for three countries' political, economic and cultural communications and cooperation, and reflects the strategic development and the cornerstone of interconnection. Based on this foundation and with the help of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and Silk Road Fund, the trilateral agreements will gradually bring many people-benefitting projects to the regions along the route. The trilateral cooperation will develop new industry and build a new Eurasian Economic Development Zone while creating the Eurasian continent logistics channel, the flow passage, traditional economic and trade cooperation.

Second, promote the role of cultural diplomacy in building China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor.

Cultural diplomacy is an important part of a country's overall diplomatic strategy, which highlights the subtle charm of the culture when compared with political, economic and military diplomacy. Whether the activity involves political communications, economic exchanges, or infrastructure construction, the bearers are human. Communications between humans ultimately include the exchange of cultures. Therefore, cultural diplomacy consisting of cultural exchanges and cooperation is the key to gaining interconnections.

The Russian Far East and Siberia region and the northern part of China are both multi-ethnic communities. Mongolia's nomadic culture shares historical relics and elements in areas adjacent to China and Russia. Different people living and multiplying in the same latitudes often develop and maintain the same or similar ways of life, eating and living. This is the reality and foundation for the trilateral cultural exchanges and cooperation. The China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor is not only economic, but also a cultural exchange corridor. The trilateral exchanges must adhere

to the developing course and promote economic cooperation and cultural exchanges. Promoting trilateral cultural exchanges in education, tourism, academics, art and other areas in a multi-level and wide range can have a positive effect on the people in the region. China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor should be developed and driven by the China-Mongolia-Russia cultural corridor construction.

Third, expand the trilateral cooperation by means of local and cross-border cooperation.

China, Mongolia and Russia border and neighbor on each other, which forms a unique geographical advantage for trilateral cooperation. Looking back in history, the economic and trade cooperation of China and Russia, and China and Mongolia started with local cooperation. It began with border trade and port trade, and gradually formed a trade mode with the three forming an organic whole. After nearly 30 years' development, Manchuria, Erenhot, Suifenhe, Hunchun, Alatan, Prague and many others border cities were formed along the border. The urbanization of all these port cities is the witness and participant of China-Mongolia, Sino-Russia trade cooperation development.

The China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor is a route that goes through three countries and depends on local cooperation. Therefore, we hope the three countries can further strengthen local and border cooperation and build on previous experience to create port, border, and cross-border cooperation leading to economic growth with characteristics that bring positive benefits to the people of the region. When the point to line and line to area radiation effect is realized, the three countries can build a new cooperation system and create a new mode of cross-border and multinational cooperation in northeast Asia.

(Editor: Jia Fengrong)