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Russia's Chairship



Special Issue

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Russia's BRICS
Chairship - 2024:
Strengthening
Multilateralism for Just
Global Development
and Security

Special Issue

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Address by Sergey Lavrov Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation

Dear friends,

In 2024, Russia has taken over the BRICS Chairship. The central theme of the Russian year in BRICS – "Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security" – reflects the desire of all participants for constructive cooperation based on the principles of international law, the values of equality, mutual respect and the sovereign choice of the path of development.

It is safe to say that 1 January 2024 marked a new era for BRICS. With the inclusion of new members from the Islamic world, heirs of the ancient Egyptian, Persian, Arab and Ethiopian civilizations – the palette of colours of BRICS has become richer, brighter and more multifaceted. Its economic and political potential has significantly strengthened, as well as its international profile, the ability to positively influence world politics and defend the interests of the Global South and East. I am confident that with such serious expansion of our family, BRICS is gaining every right to offer its own joint vision of the future world order that should reflect the multipolar realia, based on the cultural and civilizational diversity of the modern world.

Since its formation in 2006, BRICS has not opposed anyone and has been promoting a unifying agenda in international affairs. BRICS does not accept anyone's dominance; all decisions are made by consensus. Everyone can rest assured that their voice will be heard. This is the main "secret" and the magnetic power of the BRICS interaction model. I am convinced that it has every chance of becoming even more widespread in international relations in the long term.



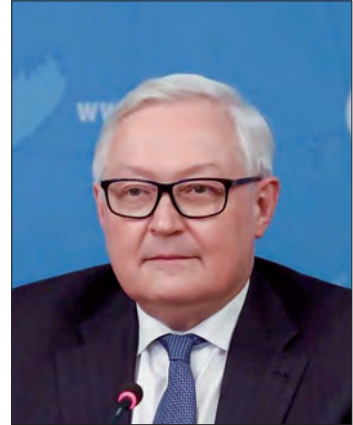
This year, Russia, as the BRICS Chair, has set up a number of important tasks. It is primarily the smooth integration of new members into all BRICS cooperation mechanisms. During this process, it is essential to maintain and where possible enhance the potential already created by the five founding states with the aim to resolve the most pressing issues through trust-based dialogue and achieving a balance of interests. The agenda also includes the task of working on the establishment of a new category of BRICS partner countries. Naturally, we will continue to strengthen interaction in the “Outreach and BRICS plus” format with an ever-expanding circle of like-minded states.

We are going to pay special attention to enhancing the role of BRICS in the international monetary and financial system and wider use of national currencies in mutual trade. We will continue to increase cultural, sports, and youth exchanges. Open BRICS Sports Games are planned for June in Kazan, to which athletes from all continents are invited.

This special issue of the magazine is presenting Russian Chairship priorities and plans in all main areas of BRICS Strategic Partnership. I am sure that we will be able to significantly strengthen cooperation in the BRICS format, achieve tangible results, and successfully hold XVI Summit in Kazan in October 2024, thereby taking another remarkable step towards peace, development and prosperity of the BRICS countries and globally.



Sergey RYABKOV



Deputy Minister of Foreign
Affairs of the Russian Federation,
Russia's Sherpa in BRICS

BRICS: yesterday, today, tomorrow

International Affairs: Dear Sergey Alekseevich,

We would like to devote today's conversation to BRICS given this year's Russian Chairship.

At the onset of the Grouping, you figuratively described it as, quote "a child who has just been born, who is basically in cradle, and time should elapse before it begins taking first steps". What are your impressions of the first meetings and now, 15 years after?

S. Ryabkov: When we were starting the dialogue back then in a four-party format, everything happened "to the touch." However, there was an understanding in the air that the world was changing. The discrepancy between the economic power of Western states and countries with rapidly

developing economies, as well as their political weight, representation in global governance institutions and influence on global decision making was becoming more obvious and requiring adjustment.

The world has embarked on a path from unipolar thinking towards pluralism, and it was necessary to keep up with the time. To paraphrase Voltaire's famous saying, if BRICS did not exist, it should have been invented. This was exactly what we did.

The leaders' declaration adopted in 2009 following the first Summit stated a shared desire to develop incremental, proactive, pragmatic, open and transparent dialogue and cooperation that would serve not only the common interests of developing countries and emerging markets, but also the construction of a harmonious world, in which lasting peace and prosperity for all would be ensured. Since then, we have always followed the designated course.

Continuing the human age analogy, today's BRICS can be compared with a fully-formed and self-confident young person who has accumulated certain practical experience and expanded his horizons. Cooperation within BRICS is developing on a wide range of issues in the spheres of politics and security, economy and finance, cultural and humanitarian ties. Active work is underway to enhance all Strategic Partnership avenues.

An extensive portfolio of joint documents has been developed – these include summit final declarations, strategies and memoranda in various areas of interaction that determine the work of the Grouping. We can also mention the BRICS Strategy on Food Security Cooperation, Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership 2025, and BRICS Counter Terrorism Strategy. A number of sectoral regulatory agreements are signed and being implemented, including in the field of finance – the Agreement establishing the New Development Bank and the Treaty for the Establishment of a BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement.

With the accession of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE to BRICS on 1 January 2024, the number of BRICS members has doubled.

LA: And there is still a queue of dozens of those interested.

SR: Yes, indeed, the number of countries that have expressed their interest in joining the work of BRICS in one form or another has already reached about three dozen and continues to grow. Largely in response to this broad demand, the Johannesburg Summit on 22–24 August 2023 made a historic decision to invite new states to become full-fledged participants of BRICS. And now, in accordance with the instructions of our Leaders, we are working on the Partner Country Model and a list of possible candidates to this category.

LA: Countries on different continents show interest in cooperation in the framework of BRICS. What, in your opinion, is the reason for such demand?

SR: Our partnership is free from superstructures – secretariats and executive committees – that over time tend to start freewheeling and promote their own corporate agenda. The Grouping's informal status allows for flexibility in cooperation, helps to avoid its bureaucratization and is more efficient in reaching a common denominator.

Relations between the BRICS countries are built on the principles of equality, mutual respect, openness and solidarity. Decisions are taken by consensus following a comprehensive discussion.

The growing economic power of the BRICS countries adds weight to their decisions. BRICS total GDP in terms of purchasing power parity has long surpassed that of the G7 (according to IMF estimates, in 2023 it equalled 32.1% and

27.6% respectively), and with the accession of new members, the BRICS collective share in the world economy will increase by another 4 percentage points. The new, expanded BRICS occupies over 30% of the Earth's landmass, has 45% of the world's population (3.6 billion people), provides for over 40% of total oil production, and about a quarter of world commodity exports.

In economics, demand is determined primarily by factors such as price, availability of substitute products and their cost. If we consider BRICS in these terms, I would say that the modern world system has no substitute to our partnership – a multilateral cooperation institution, where dialogue on a broad and relevant agenda between representatives of various cultural, socioeconomic and political structures is built on an equal basis, and the opinions of all participants in the negotiation process are taken into account. These are the main characteristics that distinguish BRICS from Western constructs, which sometimes require from their associates to give away one's sovereignty and sacrifice one's national interests; or from multilateral diplomacy institutions, whose work, by the efforts of Washington, has been discredited and reduced to a discussion of, I would even say, third-rate issues. The BRICS mission is not about weakening someone or taking someone's place, but about filling in the vacuum of global governance.

BRICS can be compared to a well-formed investment portfolio. Responding to the challenges of time and proceeding from the practical needs, various aspects of cooperation are either somewhat stalled due to objective circumstances, or, on the contrary, "shoot-out" and thus, on the whole, we get a cumulative positive effect.

During the pandemic, BRICS countries were allocated \$10 billion through the New Development Bank (NDB) to combat coronavirus infection. Currently, active cooperation can be noted in such mechanisms as, for example, the BRICS

Energy Research Cooperation Platform, the above-mentioned NDB, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, the Network University, the Young Innovator Contest; humanitarian and cultural contacts, dialogue between parliaments, parties and business circles are also being expanded.

The opportunity to be heard and receive support in solving pressing problems within BRICS, as well as additional sources of sustainable development without aggravating modalities, are of great interest to developing countries and emerging markets, as well as regional integration associations with their participation.

LA: As you noted, BRICS comprises states that belong to various civilizational communities and objectively differ in socio-economic development parameters, traditions, modernization and political models. Does such a geopolitical kaleidoscope hinder cooperation within BRICS?

SR: It is clear that difference in mentality, as well as not always coinciding interests of the participating countries make the process of aligning priorities within BRICS a labour-intensive exercise.

At the same time, BRICS countries' diverse standpoints and experience enrich cooperation and can help find a more balanced approach and efficient solutions to common problems of the global agenda, such as security challenges, modernization of the economy and social life, increasing quantitative and qualitative growth indicators, mitigating the consequences of climate change, energy and food crises, and preventing epidemics.

While the search for mutually acceptable solutions in such a format may take longer, such decisions have every chance of being sustainable and serve the interests of a wide range of international participants.

BRICS members are united by similar views on the modern world, the desire for multilateralism as the basis for sustainable development, the axiomatic UN central coordinating role,

adherence to the principles and norms of the international law, and rejection of the policy of forceful pressure and infringement of the sovereignty of other countries.

We share the desire to reform the outdated global financial and economic architecture (IMF, World Bank) which does not take into account the increased economic weight of BRICS countries and other regional centres of power. We support a multilateral trading system with a central role for the WTO. We reject unlawful economic sanctions. We insist that it is inadmissible to use the US dollar and other international financial instruments to coerce and impose political will. In this connection, the resolve to strengthen the NDB and develop the Contingent Reserve Arrangement as alternative mechanisms for providing investment and supporting state finances, increasing settlements in national currencies and bringing BRICS financial markets closer together is illustrative.

The complementarity of many sectors of our economies in the context of restructured global production-supply is also a factor in favour of developing cooperation within the Grouping.

I am convinced that BRICS, given the strong political will of its members, can in the long run become one of the key elements of a new global governance system, more representative and expressing the aspirations of the Global South and East.

LA: 2024 is the year of Russian BRICS Chairship. What goals are set for this year?

SR: The Russian BRICS Chairship has "Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security" as its motto. The main directions and priorities of our work in this format are formulated in the Concept of the 2024 Russian Federation BRICS Chairship approved by President Vladimir Putin.

The main goal is to create favourable conditions for the progressive development of Russia and all BRICS states,

strengthening their socio-economic, investment, technological and human potential. The intensity of the current year speaks for itself – a total of about 250 different events will be held. A number of introductory meetings on various interaction areas have already taken place.

An important task is to ensure the harmonious integration of new members into the existing BRICS cooperation mechanisms without compromising their effectiveness, as well as developing modalities for the Partner Country Model and the relevant list of potential candidates to this category.

We will continue to interact with like-minded countries within the Outreach/BRICS Plus mechanism. This format is of great importance in the context of building sustainable ties between the BRICS countries and Global South and East, as well as with other international and regional associations.

Within the political set of issues, we will focus on strengthening the dialogue and coordination among BRICS countries on the most topical international agenda issues at the key multilateral fora, primarily the United Nations and G20. We aim to further enhance the role of BRICS in resolving acute global and regional problems. The development of cooperation in the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and corruption, and joint search for common responses to challenges and threats in the cyber space will be in the focus of our efforts.

On the economic track, we will continue the comprehensive implementation of the BRICS Strategy for Economic Partnership 2025. We will contribute to enhanced cooperation in the trade, investment, innovation, technology and social spheres. We will put an effort to increase the role of BRICS states in the international monetary and financial system, to transform the system of international settlements, and to develop interbank cooperation within BRICS. Our partners have already supported our initiatives to create a Contact Group on climate change and sustainable

development, launch an Integrated Early Warning System for preventing mass infectious diseases, and establish a Working Group on nuclear medicine.

Particular attention will be paid to the entire range of humanitarian contacts – through municipalities, parliaments, parties, business circles, as well as in the field of culture, youth exchanges, sports and tourism.

In general, the tasks of the Russian Chairship are in line with the long-term BRICS efforts to build a kind of cooperation "grid" above the traditional "North-South" and "West-East" lines. This will help increase the role of the world majority in global governance mechanisms, and to shape a new bloc-free world system, based on the principles of mutual respect and consideration of each other's interests.



**Sergey
MOCHAL'NIKOV**



Deputy Minister of Energy of the Russian
Federation, Head of the Working Group
on Energy Cooperation with the BRICS
Member States

BRICS Energy Dialogue: Towards its Tenth Anniversary

The energy sector has traditionally occupied a special place in the framework of inter-BRICS cooperation and serves as a motor for the development of cooperation between the countries of the Association, based on complementary energy strategies, equality and mutual respect of interests.

Undoubtedly, the influence of the BRICS countries on the international stage is increasing due to the growing economic power of the member states and the expansion of the Association. Together, the BRICS countries now account for 45% of the world's population and more than a third of the world's GDP in purchasing power parity terms. Our countries are leaders in both traditional and renewable energy resources.

The Russian side has traditionally taken a strong stance on the need to strengthen the energy dimension of the BRICS dialogue, and this position is now more important than ever.

Energy cooperation has been on the agenda of the BRICS summits since the joint statement of the BRICS leaders at the 1st Summit in Ekaterinburg in 2009, in which they expressed their desire to strengthen cooperation in the energy sector.

The first meeting of BRICS energy ministers, initiated by Russia, took place in 2015 and laid the groundwork for institutionalising energy cooperation within the Association.

In the nearly ten years of the official BRICS energy dialogue, an effective structure of interaction has been established, including annual meetings of energy ministers, meetings of the Committee of Senior Officials responsible for coordinating the dialogue, as well as the regularly functioning BRICS Energy Research Platform, national secretariats and the Youth Energy Agency.

The key areas of the energy dialogue are defined in the declarations of the BRICS leaders, which always pay special attention to energy, as well as in the communiqués of the ministerial meetings. The Roadmap for BRICS Energy Cooperation until 2025 is the main strategic document on the basis of which the BRICS countries develop their energy dialogue. The preparation and adoption of the Roadmap in 2020 is a Russian initiative aimed primarily at improving the efficiency of the BRICS countries' joint efforts to develop energy cooperation and achieve practical results through a more structured and comprehensive approach.

The objective of the Roadmap is to establish a strategic energy partnership among the BRICS countries by coordinating their policies, promoting trade, investment, research and technological cooperation in the energy sector. The document provides for the comprehensive development and interaction of BRICS mechanisms, as well as the participation of interested organisations and experts, including government agencies, business, professional and scientific communities.

The current topics of BRICS energy cooperation include a wide range of issues, such as the efficient use of all energy sources, the development of advanced technologies, the improvement of energy efficiency, cooperation in personnel

training, research and development, the promotion of investment in the energy sector, including through the mechanisms of the New Development Bank, the expansion of the practice of settlement in national currencies in energy trade, and the development of mechanisms for the implementation of joint projects.

At the same time, the BRICS multilateral energy dialogue pays special attention to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 7 – ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy sources.

Together with our partners, we pay great attention to a more active participation of the countries of the association in the global energy agenda, in line with their share in world energy production and consumption, as well as to the coordination of activities in international specialised platforms.

BRICS Energy Research Cooperation Platform

One of the key mechanisms of the BRICS energy dialogue is the Energy Research Cooperation Platform (ERCP), which was launched in 2018 at Russia's initiative.

The main objectives of the BRICS ERCP are to ensure sustainable energy development through cooperation in energy research, technology and innovation, including the development of educational and professional exchanges and interaction between academia, business and other energy stakeholders.

Currently, the BRICS ERCP brings together around 100 experts from BRICS countries, representing relevant research centres, companies and universities. As new member countries join the Association, it is planned to further expand the number of member organisations of the BRICS ERCP.

The platform has 14 key areas of work, including energy research, technology cooperation, coal and gas including LNG, digitalisation, renewables, bioenergy, sustainable transport,

energy efficiency, smart grids, capacity building, hydrogen energy, and cooperation on finance and energy industry standards and regulations.

The BRICS ERCP conducts annual studies on the most topical issues in the energy sector. The uniqueness of the studies is the participation of experts from all BRICS countries in their preparation, which makes it possible to present an analytical product that reflects the most comprehensive and unique view of the BRICS countries on a particular issue. By agreement between the partners, the studies are based exclusively on national data from the BRICS countries.

The year 2020 was a truly landmark year for the Energy Platform, as the first joint BRICS studies were prepared and published under the Russian chairmanship, and a strategic vision for the development of the energy sector in the BRICS countries until 2040 was elaborated.

The *BRICS Energy Outlook 2020* is the first comprehensive study of the BRICS energy sector, detailing the current status, objectives and priorities for energy development in the BRICS countries.

Since then, the BRICS ERCP Platform has produced annual studies on the most topical issues in the energy sector. In its four years of operation, the ERCP has produced nine studies covering BRICS cooperation in technology, energy efficiency, smart grids, renewable energy, energy security and human resource development.

The national secretariats of the ERCP, which were established by decision of the energy ministers, play an important role in the preparation of studies. The Russian Secretariat operates on the basis of the Federal State Budgetary Institution *Russian Energy Agency* of the Ministry of Energy of Russia.

In 2021, the leaders of the BRICS countries included the ERCP platform in the list of the most successful cooperation mechanisms established over the 15 years of the association's existence.

Youth Energy Cooperation

Since 2015, the BRICS have been actively developing youth energy cooperation within the BRICS framework on the basis of the BRICS Youth Energy Agency, which was established on Russia's initiative. Currently, the community of young energy professionals from BRICS countries includes more than one thousand participants.

To ensure the active participation of BRICS youth in the development of BRICS energy cooperation, numerous projects are being implemented, including the annual BRICS Youth Energy Summit, the preparation and publication of the BRICS Youth Energy Outlook, and a digital platform for BRICS young energy scientists and researchers (BRICS YEA Network).

The youth of the BRICS countries are actively working to promote the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 7, and to involve the youth community of the BRICS countries in relevant cooperation mechanisms at various international platforms. In particular, under the coordination of the Russian side, BRICS youth representatives actively participate in joint projects and organise their own events at such important international platforms as the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the G20, the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Priorities for the Russian Chairmanship in 2024

The Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation has developed a list of priority areas of work for the current year. On the one hand, there is a lot of work to be done to ensure the continuity and further development of the successes and achievements of BRICS energy cooperation in the previous period, and on the other hand, to create conditions for the

development and strengthening of the multilateral energy dialogue within the framework of the Association, taking into account the expansion of its membership.

The Russian Chairmanship will seek to create all the necessary conditions for the earliest possible full integration of the new participants in the BRICS Energy Dialogue.

At the first meeting of the BRICS Senior Officials Committee on Energy, held in Moscow on 26-27 February this year, we proposed three key priorities of our Chairmanship in the field of energy:

- 1) Developing the national energy systems of the BRICS countries by deepening inter-BRICS cooperation, taking into account the accession of new participants to the Association;
- 2) Deepening cooperation in technology and innovation, strengthening technological sovereignty and improving conditions for attracting investment;
- 3) Enhancing the role of the BRICS in the global dialogue on current energy issues.

All BRICS member countries expressed their support for the Russian Chairmanship's priorities in the energy sector and pledged their active participation in their implementation.

We have planned seven events this year to help implement these priorities. The main event will be the BRICS Energy Week, which we have timed to coincide with the *Russian Energy Week* International Forum, to be held in Moscow on 26–28 September. The BRICS Energy Week will include the main event of the energy dialogue – the BRICS Energy Ministers' Meeting, as well as the annual meeting of the BRICS Energy Research Cooperation Platform and the BRICS Youth Energy Summit.

One of the tasks of the Russian Chairmanship this year is to prepare proposals for the Roadmap for BRICS Energy Cooperation until 2030. To this end, we plan to organise a discussion within the framework of the forthcoming events on the energy track, during which representatives of the BRICS member countries will be able to make relevant proposals for updating the document. The need to update the Roadmap is dictated not only by the approaching end of the Five-Year Plan,

but also by the expansion of the membership, as well as by the significant changes in the global energy landscape, which need to be reflected in the new version of the document.

In the spirit of continuity, it is planned to continue multidisciplinary work on energy security issues, which are now at the forefront of the global energy agenda.

Within the framework of the Russian BRICS Chairmanship in 2024, it is proposed to conduct a study on the formation of BRICS approaches to a fair energy transition on the basis of the Energy Research Cooperation Platform. We agree that the energy transition should be based on the national characteristics and interests of each country and should be sustainable, fair, affordable and inclusive.

Based on the stated national targets for achieving carbon neutrality, we plan to develop and justify the principles for a just transition in the interests of the BRICS countries, including the free exchange of knowledge and technology on mutually acceptable terms, strength-based cooperation to work together, and the principle of technological neutrality.

During the Chairmanship year, special attention will be paid to technological cooperation, including strengthening the technological sovereignty of our countries. We are interested in the development of low-carbon technologies and non-discriminatory access to advanced technologies.

This year, the Russian side invites the partner countries to consider opportunities for in-depth cooperation in promoting technological solutions for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, carbon capture and storage, energy efficiency, clean coal technologies, hydrogen and renewable energy technologies, as well as standardisation and mutual recognition of certification systems for renewable energy, low-carbon hydrogen and its derivatives. We plan to devote the second meeting of the BRICS Senior Officials Committee on Energy, which will be held in Kemerovo in July, to this issue.

We will continue our cooperation in the development of human resources for the fuel and energy sector in the BRICS countries in

the context of the energy transition. In addition, a rich programme of activities is expected this year under the Youth Energy Track, culminating in the annual BRICS Youth Summit.

We plan, with the support of our partners, to continue and expand our successful experience of cooperation in the international format, taking into account the involvement of other interested countries in the dialogue on a wide range of issues. It is clear that the countries of the Association should increase their influence in the global arena and continue to coordinate and consolidate joint efforts to promote our vision of a fair, equitable and depoliticised energy dialogue.



The BRICS Energy Dialogue is expanding every year, with concrete developments in joint technology development and project implementation, progress on the Energy Cooperation Roadmap, and the growing research potential of the BRICS Energy Platform.

The BRICS Energy Dialogue should further promote economic development, sustainable development goals and equitable energy transition in our countries. I am convinced that our countries are interested in the stable development of the global energy sector, the free flow of capital and technology, and ensuring global energy security.

Taking into account the entry of new countries into the BRICS, it is important to continue a constructive and coordinated dialogue to develop common approaches to pressing issues on the global energy agenda.

Russia, as the chair of BRICS in 2024, will make every effort to create the necessary conditions for strengthening the energy dialogue within the framework of the Association, and I am confident that together we will be able to make significant progress in implementing the goals and objectives set in the energy track.



Gleb NIKITIN



Governor of the
Nizhny Novgorod region

Inter-Municipal Cooperation as an Impetus for Effective Civil Society Development in BRICS Countries

In 2024, Russia will once again chair the BRICS group of ten countries. In this context, the Nizhny Novgorod region has the honour of hosting a number of important events, one of which is the BRICS Forum of BRICS partner cities and municipalities, which will take place on 9–10 July 2024. It will bring together more than 200 leaders, youth representatives and parliamentarians from municipalities of Russia and other BRICS countries. The Forum will be a platform for exchanging views and discussing initiatives in key areas of inter-municipal cooperation.

The main topics include economic development of municipalities, architecture of modern cities and agglomerations, digitalisation of the urban environment, environmental problems of modern cities and ways of solving

them, as well as youth, cultural and educational cooperation between sister municipalities of the BRICS countries.

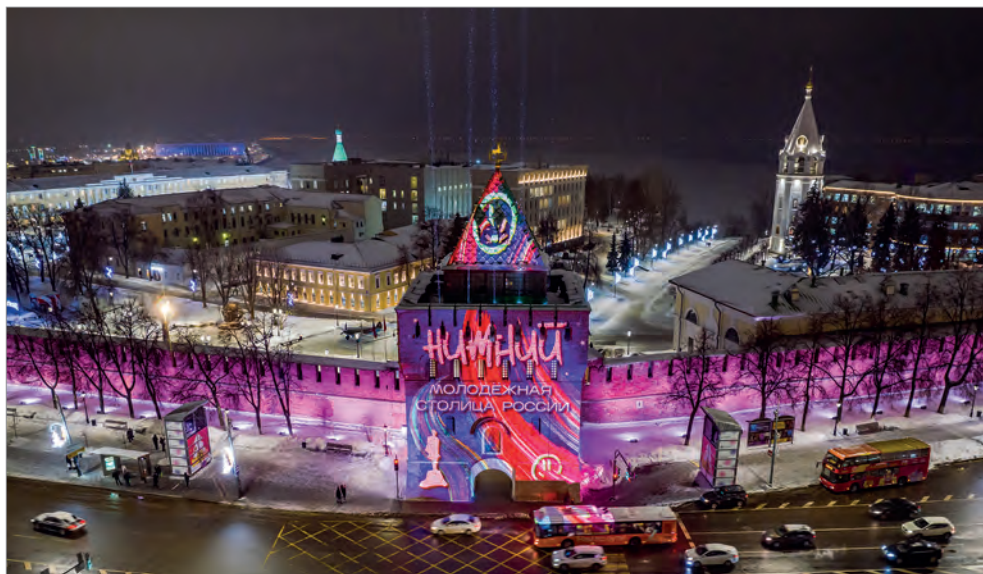
Today, twinning is not only the establishment of friendly relations between cities or municipalities to get to know each other's culture and life, but also a mechanism of communication between different entities to share experience in solving significant social and economic problems.

For example, the rapid development and expansion of cities, qualitative and quantitative demographic changes inevitably lead to the emergence of new threats and challenges of a social, environmental, urban and other nature, most of which are typical of both Russia and other countries. At the same time, there are differences in practical approaches to combating or preventing such challenges, the exchange of which may become a key element of interaction between the BRICS member countries.

It is no coincidence that the Nizhny Novgorod region was chosen to host the BRICS Twin Cities and Municipalities Forum. Undoubtedly, the region is an important Russian centre in terms of industrial development, education, history and culture. However, the development of Nizhny Novgorod as a centre of international cooperation began only 33 years ago, when its administrative capital Nizhny Novgorod (before 1990 – the city of Gorky) was opened to foreign citizens in 1991.

Since then, the international community's interest in the city and the region as a whole has continued to grow. At present, Nizhny Novgorod is developing cooperation with 30 partner regions both near and far. The multifaceted cooperation of Nizhny Novgorod's municipalities is growing even faster, and they already have about 80 contractual documents on cooperation with municipalities in other countries. At the same time, Nizhny Novgorod alone has 23 twin cities.

Of course, the region's geographical location and its economic, scientific, educational and cultural potential have influenced the development of its international relations. However, this is mainly due to the new approach adopted by the government of the Nizhny Novgorod region. This approach has



been formed taking into account global trends, priority policy directions of the Russian Federation, as well as the region's competitive advantages.

The motto of the new approach is *Together for One*, which means uniting generations, representatives of different professions to achieve a common goal. The motto *Together for One* was coined by the great citizen of Nizhny Novgorod, Kuzma Minin, one of the leaders of the Nizhny Novgorod militia in the early 17th century, whose ranks united people of different ages and social classes.

This is clearly reflected in the organisation of major national and international events, as well as Nizhny Novgorod's status as the *Youth Capital* and *Cultural Capital* of Russia. Every year, the city and region host a wide range of events, including those with international participation, in fields ranging from HR to IT.

This year, Nizhny Novgorod region became one of 30 entities of the Russian Federation where the regional programme of the World Youth Festival was implemented. More than 110 youth representatives from 50 countries visited the region to get acquainted with its iconic cultural sites,

scientific and educational centres, to feel the Nizhny Novgorod soul and genuine Russian hospitality.

It has also become a tradition for the Nizhny Novgorod region to host the *Digitalisation of Industrial Russia* conference with the support of the Government of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Nizhny Novgorod region. The Conference is the main event on the digital economy in Russia, a key platform for dialogue between business and government representatives on the digital transformation of society and various sectors of the economy.

Nizhny Novgorod has changed many times in its centuries-long history. New trends have been the engine of change not only economically or socially, but also culturally. The most striking changes in Nizhny Novgorod took place in the context of the celebration of its 800th anniversary in 2021. A significant part of the city has been modernised, taking into account the opinions and wishes of Nizhny Novgorod residents. Today Nizhny Novgorod is a modern, liveable, developed city that can rightly serve as an example of a successful combination of historical heritage and modernity.

The unique experience of Nizhny Novgorod and its municipalities, as well as other Russian and foreign cities, is the basis for the attraction and development of multifaceted cooperation. That is why the establishment of inter-municipal communication is one of the most important tasks of the global community, and the platform of the BRICS Friendship Cities and Municipal Cooperation Forum is perfectly suited for its realisation.



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Trade Policy Interaction Among BRICS Members

BRICS is an important forum for discussing a wide range of the most pressing issues facing the global economy. These include trade, climate change, energy and food security. On 1 January 2024, this informal grouping was joined by five new members, and since then it has come to account for about 28 percent of the global economy¹.

Most of the BRICS countries² are members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). By establishing more effective interaction among the ten member states, the BRICS will be able to increase their influence on global processes, including the development and improvement of multilateral trade rules at the WTO.

At present, BRICS interaction in the WTO covers various areas, including strengthening the position of developing countries in the global trading system.

Supporting WTO reform, including reform of the dispute settlement system, strengthening global value chains, countering protectionism and providing technical assistance to developing countries are areas where joint work can yield significant results.

Although the BRICS countries have different economic systems and are at different stages of development, and there are natural differences in trade policy interests, they are actively working to take coordinated decisions within the WTO. They are interested in increased coordination on important issues such as the agricultural agenda, including the issue of public stockholding for food security purposes.

Establishing effective cooperation on the trade and political agenda is one of the main objectives of the Russian Federation's BRICS chairmanship in 2024. Russian initiatives include developing joint proposals to support the multilateral trading system and make the WTO work more effectively, developing joint proposals on the application of trade measures related to environmental protection and climate change, promoting cooperation in the area of agricultural trade facilitation and the smooth operation of joint supply and production chains.

The BRICS countries are paying more and more attention to expanding their participation in global value chains and to increasing trade between the member countries. Of course, there are certain obstacles on this path, in particular trade barriers. In this context, Russia suggests looking for ways to simplify trade rules and increase the competitiveness of BRICS members' products in global markets, expand export potential and increase the welfare of citizens.

For example, with the increasing digitalisation of the world economy and the emergence of new technologies, the development of measures to promote cross-border trade in online services between BRICS countries, including medical services, appears to be one of the most important areas of cooperation. A proposal to this effect was circulated by India³ in the WTO. Russia has supported this initiative. At the same time, the expansion of BRICS cooperation in telemedicine and the removal of barriers to the cross-border provision of remote medical services can reduce

the associated costs for health economies and improve access to such services for the population.

What the BRICS countries have in common is that they have always supported a multilateral trading system based on WTO rules and opposed protectionist measures that contradict the organisation's rules. Through joint efforts, the member countries of the Group are able to counter non-competitive practices of individual WTO members that violate the rules and fundamental principles of the organisation. The Russian initiative in support of the multilateral trading system reflects this approach and underlines the destructive effect of unilateral, so-called sanctions measures.

BRICS countries also need to strengthen cooperation in developing regulatory trade policies related to climate change and environmental protection. The increasing use of protectionist trade measures adopted under the pretext of combating climate change and protecting the environment will lead to the fragmentation of the multilateral trading system and hamper the development of low-carbon industries and the achievement of sustainable development goals. In order to maintain fair competition, climate measures should not lead to discrimination.

At the same time, the growing popularity of *green* technologies and the transition to clean energy can lead to a 'subsidy race', which in turn undermines countries' competitiveness and harms global trade. Developing countries, which make up a large proportion of the Union's membership, are the most vulnerable to such a race to the bottom. It is essential to ensure that all measures to combat climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss are designed, adopted and implemented in full compliance with WTO rules. They should not result in arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination or disguised restrictions on international trade. However, a stable and sustainable multilateral trading system is unthinkable without promoting the economic development of all its participants, including by transferring and diffusing productive technologies and skills.

The BRICS countries are major players in agricultural markets, both in terms of production and consumption. Therefore, the Russian initiative on facilitation of trade in agricultural products

is aimed at ensuring the availability of food, reducing food losses, addressing the problem of uneven distribution of such products and increasing the transparency of related processes. The joint work of the BRICS members in this area will help to achieve the stated objectives and form a set of principles and approaches to agricultural trade facilitation.

The regulation of certain types of government support, including industrial subsidies, agricultural subsidies, disproportionate *anti-crisis* solutions, as well as *green* policies that distort the conditions of competition in international trade, could also be a potential issue for more effective BRICS engagement on the trade agenda, including in the WTO. The regulation of artificial intelligence, which is already having a major impact on the organisation of production processes and the functioning of global value chains, is another issue that needs to be addressed. It is important that member countries actively participate in future discussions on the development of relevant regulations to ensure that future disciplines take full account of BRICS economic interests in this area.

In general, the Russian Federation expects that, during its BRICS presidency, member countries will intensify their joint efforts to find ways to improve conditions for economic and trade cooperation. This would enable the BRICS to respond more effectively to modern challenges in the global economy and defend common interests within the WTO. Coordinated trade policy decisions, increased economic and investment cooperation, and efforts to combat unfair trade practices could be the key to sustained growth and strengthening BRICS's global influence.

¹ <https://www.africanews.com/2024/01/02/brics-expansion-five-countries-join-ranks/>

² Iran and Ethiopia are in the process of joining the WTO.

³ Council for Trade in Services, ROLE OF TELEMEDICINE SERVICES IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC, Communication from India, 24 February 2023, WT/GC/W/866, S/C/W/426 [directdoc.aspx (wto.org)]



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Global Governance without Global Unification

Every day brings greater uncertainty about the future of humanity. The breakdown of the system of global governance, which occurred with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the era of bipolarity, and which led to a situation of aggressive redistribution of spheres of influence in favour of the remaining hegemon, has created a situation of irrevocable need to reform the international system, taking into account the real voice of the majority of the world's countries.

What's the Power, American?

While the cooperative formats of the majority of countries worldwide, such as BRICS, were largely inherited from a group that claimed the authority to determine the parameters of global interaction, the development of BRICS has revealed

significant departures in content and spirit from its founding model. Key differences include the adherence to the principle of sovereign equality and mutual respect within the group, regardless of bilateral issues, which extends to relations with other countries and peoples. This approach contrasts with the assertion of moral superiority and the imposition of political conditions in exchange for limited aid, which perpetuates dependency and inhibits long-term progress for aid recipients. Within BRICS, the emphasis is on promoting dialogue and finding mutually acceptable solutions to complex issues, rather than imposing unilateral dictates. Development is pursued in accordance with national aspirations, culture and traditions, rejecting rigid restrictions dictated by the interests of a few countries. The Group promotes dialogue between civilisations, cultures and religions, rather than advocating standardisation and homogenisation that undermines individual identity.

It is this, rather than quantitative indicators of superiority such as aggregate GDP in PPP or industrial output, that seems to make the BRICS more attractive to many countries than similar formats of Western states, and offers greater opportunities for unification in addressing the challenges of reforming the international system towards greater representativeness and fairness of regulatory principles. BRICS is now in a position to give a voice and a chance to the states that have traditionally been on the *periphery* of the international system to choose the main parameters of their future, and this opportunity is not only available to those who are officially members of the Group.

It would seem that an even more representative forum that could provide such opportunities is the G20, which includes most of the BRICS members as well as the 'older' G7 countries. In practice, however, the G20 unfortunately resembles an element of the same dying world order observed in the G7. Despite its increased representativeness, especially with the recent accession of the African Union, the G20 is marred by the confrontational attitudes of Western representatives, the politicisation of global issues and attempts to impose the G7's "correct" views on others. The decline in the culture of dialogue among the representatives

of the Golden Billion undermines the effective functioning of any institution or mechanism in which they participate, unless it is fully aligned with their interests. This problem extends beyond club mechanisms such as the G20 to global institutions such as the WTO. Even areas such as culture, science or sport, which should serve to unite and transcend politics, are being politicised and exploited by Western states. The deplorable speeches by the President of the International Olympic Committee are a case in point, tarnishing the institution's reputation.

And that is why, despite the fact that the Western powers are still the main holders of financial, technological and other resources that give them leverage over the majority of the world's countries, at the expense of which the countries of the Golden Billion have gained all the existing advantages and opportunities for dominance, there is a growing objective need to identify and support an alternative centre of power capable of protecting their interests. We are not talking about a confrontation between the BRICS and the West, at least none of the member countries thinks so. We are talking about a constructive agenda, the development of new mutually beneficial ideas, the creation of additional projects and mechanisms when global institutions fail. None of the BRICS is talking about abolishing the World Bank or the IMF, even though the last decision on a fair quota review, reached in 2009, remains stalled. The shortcomings of the current global system are being compensated by new alternative mechanisms such as the BRICS New Development Bank, which aims to bridge the existing gap in infrastructure investment needs around the world.

The situation is similar for many other institutions of global governance. The issue of UN reform has been stagnant for a long time, with no real progress. What role can the BRICS play in this process? On the one hand, there has been significant progress in general statements on the place and role of the BRICS countries that are not permanent members of the UN Security Council. On the other hand, it is clear that these changes are unlikely to be implemented in practice just by the issuance of relevant documents by the leaders of the BRICS countries.

However, what BRICS can contribute in this regard is the added weight and authority of its members in the international arena as a whole. This applies to the United Nations, any of the organisations within the UN system, or any other international institution. In addition to qualitative strengthening, quantitative factors also play an important role. For example, despite the stalemate in revising IMF quotas to more fairly reflect the capabilities of the World Majority in the light of new realities, the BRICS countries have a combined share of 18%. This allows them to prevent unfavourable decisions within the IMF.

It is also crucial for BRICS to act as proponents of modernised approaches to building an international relations system, followed by advocacy within the entire UN structure and among member states, especially those belonging to the World Majority.

Equally significant is the conceptual stance of BRICS as a peaceful alternative or antithesis to Samuel Huntington's clash of civilisations scenario. Through practical interaction and humanitarian cooperation, the group presents an alternative vision of peaceful and mutually beneficial coexistence among different cultures and civilisations. However, given the increasingly assertive position of the West, despite the BRICS stance of not being against anyone, the likelihood of the *West versus the rest* concept being put into practice is increasing. In this context, the role of BRICS is not only to create and nurture a space of trust and cooperation among the countries of the World Majority, but also to mitigate the potential negative consequences for global development and for the citizens of all countries, including Western nations, resulting from the aggressive policies of the global Western elites.

Another potential avenue for consideration is the utilisation of the already-tested methodology of establishing parallel alternative mechanisms in those areas where progress is essential for the progressive development of the BRICS countries and the majority of countries globally, yet where the institutions created by the Western community are either unable or deliberately unwilling to cope. However, it is important to exercise caution and avoid the creation of a multitude of new bureaucratic entities that ostensibly

embody aspirations for a novel vision, yet in essence merely replicate existing structures, albeit with minor adaptations, originally designed to serve the interests of Western powers. In light of this, it is essential to revisit one of the most prominent examples of BRICS collaboration: the New Development Bank. If we attempt to align this bank with the established framework set by the Bretton Woods institutions, it will restrict rather than expand its potential for fostering novel financial relations.

Similarly, all areas of interaction between the BRICS countries should be addressed in a uniform manner. This encompasses not only monetary and financial systems, but also broader economic considerations such as energy, ecology, food security, and technological development. In terms of platform solutions, the BRICS countries should pursue genuine openness and equal participation in their implementation. It is crucial that experts from the BRICS countries prioritize standardization and the development of criteria for different areas of international cooperation. This should be carried out in a way that takes into account the development needs and priorities of the majority of the world's population, including the creation of new areas and the revision of existing ones as necessary.

Hence the call to join BRICS, to engage in equal and mutually respectful discussions, and to become an active participant in shaping the image of the future. It is worth noting that the number of BRICS members has doubled in the past year, and an even more impressive list of countries that have not yet joined the club but are willing to cooperate to a greater or lesser extent. This brings to mind the G7, a pioneer of the club concept. Once, Russia earnestly sought to join this group by completing all required tasks and trying to please the established members. However, as national pride was restored and the importance of sovereignty recognized, it became clear that Russia's interests did not align with the group's goals or the broader global development agenda. All attempts to invite China to the G7 failed. Besides the perception of exclusivity among its members and their high-end status, there has been no expression of interest from major developing countries to join. It is the lot of

lords to remain in proud solitude in their *blooming garden*, staying away from the "wild jungle" and its inhabitants.

When a Thousand Flowers Bloom

What provides the BRICS with broader opportunities than those available to the wealthier states of the Golden Billion – here we will discuss not so much the principles discussed earlier, but the tools themselves that have made it possible to achieve more daring and attractive projects and solutions.

Firstly, since its inception, BRICS has functioned as a comprehensive initiative, rather than simply a forum for leaders to debate economic issues. It gathers not only like-minded people but also enthusiasts. Significantly, the innovative aspect of this unique format stems from its grassroots origins. Although the formal first BRICS summit took place in 2009, a year earlier, a gathering of BRICS intellectuals took place at the initiative of Vyacheslav Nikonov. This intellectual exchange was a precursor to the official process, which does not undermine the significant role of other initiatives, such as the Primakov doctrine of the triangle and discussions within the Heiligendamm Process, along with subsequent official meetings held at the UN.

Further developments have shown that this intellectual visionary activity has maintained its relevance, as many significant BRICS initiatives originated in the debates and discussions of experts. Furthermore, decisions enshrined in the Durban Declaration formalizing the interaction process with experts and businesses were also a result of the contribution of these experts to the Association's development. It is difficult to overstate the importance of expert input in the BRICS and we can speak of both government agencies and research institutions, especially given the urgent need for scientific justification for the positions taken by the Association.

If we examine the decision-making processes within the G7 and G20, we will find that most expert justifications and analyses of these decisions are carried out within the OECD, an organisation that includes all G7 members but excludes all BRICS countries.

This is significant considering that BRICS nations account for approximately 45% of the world's population compared to around 10% for G7 countries. Additionally, about 38.3% of global industrial output is concentrated in BRICS countries, whereas G7 accounts for less than one-third. Moreover, BRICS states have significantly more key mineral resources than G7 nations. The GDP of BRICS based on PPP has reached 37.3%, whereas the share of G7 in global gross product is decreasing and currently does not exceed 30%. Despite the generally high level of expertise possessed by documents developed by the OECD, it should be borne in mind that the proposed criteria and standards in the fields of taxation and economic policy, as well as other issues that the organisation is working on, will inevitably have national characteristics and indirectly promote the interests of its member countries without taking into account the specific interests or characteristics of external states. Obviously, under these circumstances, it is necessary to create an international expert and analytical structure for the BRICS countries to develop guidance documents, review BRICS initiatives, provide analytical materials and prepare monitoring reports and ratings, identify best practices, and develop compatibility criteria and common standards. Moreover, such a structure should become the basis for developing expert positions, not only for BRICS, but also for other international organisations, whether it's the G20, or any other organisation or mechanism that involves countries from the majority of the world.

As noted above, such an idea, although in a limited form, has been organised to some extent, just in a slightly different manner. The network structure of horizontal interaction between the national coordinators of the BRICS countries, formalized as the BRICS Think Tank Council (BTTC), aims to solve many of these problems. However, we see today more thematic interactions between national coordinators, with an agenda tailored to each new presidency, rather than real continuity. While we are not advocating the abandonment of the sovereign elements of this council, it seems necessary to provide a unified technological platform for its interaction, perhaps through a distributed ledger, and to increase the

resource capacity of the BTTC significantly with the participation of all BRICS nations.

In this context, we can recall the initiative to establish a virtual BRICS secretariat that was discussed in expert circles some time ago and even appeared in final documents of the leadership. The idea behind its creation was to overcome bureaucratic obstacles that would inevitably arise if BRICS were institutionalized into a fully-fledged international organisation. It was also envisioned to create a shared "historical" and "documentary" memory of the group and provide a platform for interaction within the official track. However, this initiative remains largely on paper as the practical implementation of the concept reveals more risks than opportunities. The virtual secretariat remains in a non-AR domain.

However, this does not mean that we should not revisit and rethink the idea today. This could allow the BRICS countries to create their own strong analytical centre, similar to the OECD. Such a centre could combine analytical and research resources, provide archiving services, rapid and orderly access to important documents, and potentially use AI algorithms to periodically optimize existing projects and documents. It could also offer a platform for interaction between national coordinators and potentially integrate with official structures' platforms. While many BRICS representatives advocated for unity during their term in office, the subsequent implementation of their ideas often consisted of launching and maintaining a website where each member could post materials. For instance, the Indian ORF initiated a similar project to host common BRICS documents, such as the BRICS Vision, crafted collectively by representatives from all national think tanks. Following the results of its chairmanship last year, South Africa's SABTT came out with the idea of the BRICS Academy and a common website on the topic.

In general, the functionality of a platform that includes independent but interconnected national segments can be significantly expanded. With a shared umbrella, individual sectors can be dedicated to various outreach formats, including the expert track (e.g., BRICS Business Council and Women's

Business Alliance), youth and parliamentary tracks, civil society organisations, and STI. This approach would not only ensure the successful implementation of these functions but also streamline interactions within BRICS. It would create a single-entry point for anyone interested in promoting BRICS activities, while maintaining the democratic nature and transparency of the process through registration of bona fide participants.

For instance, young people exploring educational and development opportunities in science and education will find it easier to navigate if they know that any players in this field must be represented on the platform. This applies to universities authorized as participants in the BRICS Network University. Simply having "BRICS" in their name and a colourful website without verification within the BRICS unified space will indicate the true status of these players and prevent potential students and learners from being misled.

Likewise, in the realm of business interactions among BRICS countries, the presence of a particular company on the general register signifies that this player on the market is a verified and reliable partner. Conversely, numerous scammers, even if their name includes *BRICS* and they claim connections with BRICS organisations, would be unable to undergo verification for inclusion on this platform, enhancing integrity, transparency, and significantly reducing risks of conducting business within the BRICS area.

It is interesting to observe how the BRICS community has evolved over the years and become enriched with new meanings and activities. Thanks to Russian initiatives, the Expert Track has gained prominence and the Civil Track has emerged as a key component of Track Two Diplomacy. A wide range of engagement with young people from BRICS countries and World Majority countries strengthens their interactions. Among the most significant youth projects are the BRICS International School and the BRICS Youth Summit, which feature five relevant thematic events, cultural events, and awareness raising events for all BRICS nations.

The BRICS Civil Forum, launched by Russia in 2015, deserves special attention and discussion. Given our country's

emphasis on engaging with civil society, it is not surprising that we initiated a similar process in other organisations during our chairmanship. While the main event of the year is the BRICS Civil Summit scheduled for early July, it's important to recognize that every outreach event is part of an ongoing process that encourages the fullest participation of all stakeholders in constructive dialogue. In the run-up to the Academic Forum scheduled to take place at the end of May, regular thematic roundtables are conducted as part of the Expert Track, covering the entire range of topics on the chairmanship agenda. Similarly, the Civil Track includes nine key working groups, each composed of representatives from civil society in all five BRICS countries. These groups work on proposals and recommendations that will later be presented to leaders of the BRICS nations. The final recommendations have become a traditional feature of our outreach efforts, but this year we expect to see new formats, including two documents produced as part of the Civil Track. In addition to standard recommendations, a statement for the UN Future Summit on the will be drafted, allowing BRICS civil society to express its vision of a shared future and development objectives that benefit the whole world.

In general, it should be noted that the existing BRICS outreach formats have already proven themselves and have become a significant factor in ensuring the efficiency of the Association. BRICS is a complex and multifaceted entity capable of tackling super-challenges, and these opportunities, which sometimes complicate work within the Alliance, are derived precisely from the participation of numerous stakeholders interested in BRICS' activities and depend on the cohesion of the dialogue mechanism within the Group. In the current geopolitical climate, perhaps only BRICS can address the scale of challenges humanity faces and promote solutions in the interest of all humankind. The future lies with BRICS, and BRICS encompasses all of us.



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The International Monetary and Financial System: Reforming the Existing One and Building a New One to Benefit BRICS

The current international monetary and financial system (IMFS) has evolved since the early 1970s after the end of the Bretton Woods system and reached its peak during the period of globalisation. This evolution eventually led to a high concentration and centralisation of the key pillars of the IMFS: (I) the US dollar as the main reserve currency, (II) the Bretton Woods system of institutions, (III) the global financial infrastructure.

Trends and Challenges in the International Monetary and Financial System

The main features of the current International Monetary and Financial System include free international capital flows, trade liberalisation and floating

exchange rates. These features have contributed greatly to the economic convergence of advanced economies, emerging market and developing countries. At the same time, this interdependence amplifies global shocks and crises.

Let me give some vivid examples of the destabilising potential and fundamental flaws of the current IMFS: the Mexican peso crisis, the Asian financial crisis, the European debt crisis, the global financial crisis caused by COVID-19, and the current geopolitical conflicts. These events have highlighted long-standing problems with an international monetary system that relies heavily on a single currency and a centralised financial architecture, leading to increased volatility in capital markets.

Growing concerns about the dominance of the US dollar and its associated financial infrastructure have been exacerbated by unsustainably high and rising levels of public debt in advanced economies. In addition, as the role of emerging market and developing countries in the global economy and international trade has grown, their under-representation in the Global Financial Safety Net (GFSN)¹ has become more apparent. The GFSN is seen as an important element of the international financial architecture, together with the necessary financial infrastructure to support financial integration and globalisation. The key elements of the GFSN are foreign exchange reserves, swap lines and central bank repurchase agreements. The main reasons for developing countries' concerns about the GFSN are as follows:

- The main component of the GFSN is international reserves, but their value and security have been increasingly questioned recently;
- The provision of bilateral swap agreements in reserve currencies remains largely at the discretion of AEs' central banks;
- the role of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) remains uncertain and the current approach to SDR allocations has proved inadequate;
- the lack of progress on quota and voting reforms in the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and other key international organisations, where AEs continue to dominate, while the role of EMDEs is very limited;

- The US dollar has become an instrument of political pressure.

The United States has a mechanism for imposing extraterritorial restrictions and for monitoring compliance. The main role in these processes is played by the US Treasury Department in close coordination with other agencies. Thus, the sanctions institutions, as well as the dominant position of the US dollar in the financial sphere, allow the US to use unilateral restrictive measures in its own interest.

Moreover, high inflation in the United States, resulting from its imprudent and uncoordinated economic policies, is leading to an "export of inflation" to other markets. As a result, developing countries, which should be ensuring stable economic growth at home, are instead forced to take measures to neutralise the external effects of advanced countries. In addition, many of these countries use the US dollar as their main currency for international transactions, making them overly vulnerable to changes in the global economy. The role of the US dollar as the main currency in international trade creates uncertainty in the balance of payments, which leads to higher prices for basic goods and services, a decline in the purchasing power of the population and growing social discontent. In the long run, this can lead to a decline in production, job losses and lower economic growth.

In view of the above, emerging market and developing economies are faced with an urgent need to reform the current IMFS.

Improving the Old: Reforming the Existing IMFS

The global financial crisis that began in 2008 was the second largest financial crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. And, as is usually the case, every major crisis becomes a prerequisite for the development of new rules and tools for effective financial regulation. The global financial crisis was no exception, and it highlighted the need to reform the international financial institutions, in particular the International Monetary Fund.

In the context of the G20, leading advanced economies, emerging market and developing countries have worked out the dimensions of IMF reform, which include revising quotas and voting rights, strengthening the Fund's accountability, creating

a flexible credit line, reforming the lending process and increasing the IMF's resources. However, implementation of the agreements has been delayed, mainly due to the longstanding refusal of the US Congress to consider a bill that would allow ratification of the reform. The package of proposals to reform the IMF's quota and governance system, adopted at the G20 summits and approved by the Fund's Board of Governors in 2010, did not enter into force until 2016. For five years, the international community has been in a situation where the success of the reform has depended on the position of one country, albeit the most influential in the Fund.

Thus, despite Western countries' understanding of the need to increase the role and representation of emerging market and developing countries in the IMF in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, the 2010 IMF quota reform did not result in significant changes in the distribution of quotas and, consequently, votes.

Since then, emerging market and developing economies, whose share of the global economy has been steadily increasing year by year, have repeatedly tried to promote reforms to increase their own role and influence in the modern global financial architecture. However, efforts in this area have yielded very limited results. The reform of the IMF quota system, which is urgently needed for emerging market and developing economies, has not yet been implemented. This is due to the long-standing position of the United States to block any efforts to reform the IMF's decision-making system in order to maintain its blocking vote in the Fund.

It is important to note that at the same time there has been a substitution of concepts. Over the past decade, when the Western world has spoken of reforming the "international financial architecture", it has tended to mean reforming the IMF and the World Bank Group, rather than the entire "international monetary and financial system".

It is hard to disagree that the growing role of emerging market and developing economies in the global economy is a challenge for the current IMFS. In the past, much of the political and economic influence belonged to the advanced economies that had the privilege of issuing reserve currencies. This was supported by many

mechanisms, including bilateral reserve currency swap arrangements, the dominance of developed economies in the IMF, the World Bank Group and some of the largest multilateral development institutions. Despite some reforms in these institutions, the development of regional financial arrangements, significant investments in emerging markets and developing countries, the redistribution of the global financial safety net, the failure of the multilateral development banks to meet the infrastructure investment needs of developing countries and the subsequent transformation of the MDBs into "climate banks", and many other issues have eroded the IMFS and fuelled discussions about the need for its reform.

Finally, the current IMF is not able to provide long-term and large-scale financing for the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)². For example, more than half of low-income countries are at high risk of a debt crisis (or are already in one) and are trying to find a compromise between ensuring resilience and stable growth and investing in the SDGs.

Thus, the current international situation encourages emerging market and developing countries to work together to improve the current IMFS and to create an alternative financial infrastructure that would exclude any form of domination and allow their interests to be safeguarded. However, this cooperation is mostly on a bilateral basis, which makes it difficult to implement their initiatives at the multilateral level. Recognising this fact, BRICS, as the largest intergovernmental association of emerging market and developing countries, under the Russian presidency in 2024, is focusing on the initiatives to reform the IMFS at the multilateral level. I would like to note that the need to strengthen and reform the system of global governance institutions, such as the IMF, the World Bank Group, the WTO and the UN, was one of the priorities of the Brazilian BRICS Chairmanship in 2019.

The two activities of emerging market and developing countries – improving existing global governance institutions and building alternative financial infrastructure – are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are complementary and allow developing countries to ensure that their interests are taken into account.

Enabling the New: Developing Alternative Financial Infrastructure

The scale of the modern challenges facing states goes beyond the generally accepted international financial architecture and requires a comprehensive analysis and “fine-tuning” of the existing international monetary and financial system.

Emerging market and developing countries are vulnerable in the current IMFS environment, which favours the transmission of US policy shocks to the rest of the economies, especially developing countries. This in turn creates global cycles of volatility in output and capital flows. Even with effective macroprudential policies, national authorities have not been able to fully mitigate the resulting adverse effects. In addition, US monetary policy decisions have increased the cost of borrowing and exacerbated the debt vulnerability of developing countries, which discourages investment and undermines financial stability, forcing other countries to adjust their economic policies to the detriment of growth and development. This dependence leads to significant volatility in capital flows, clearly a consequence of the so-called *Triffin Dilemma*, which persists despite the abandonment of the gold-dollar standard.

In recent years, the international financial infrastructure has undergone a wave of politicisation. The dominant role of the American dollar in global settlements has become the main instrument used by the United States to isolate states that pursue an independent foreign policy. The use of unilateral sanctions as a policy tool has increased in recent decades. Under these circumstances, emerging markets are actively exploring possible measures to develop alternative financial infrastructures in order to reduce dependence and increase financial sovereignty.

Key global leaders – Russia, China, India, Brazil and a number of other countries, including the new BRICS members – are actively engaged in building alternative financial settlement mechanisms. The main activities within this framework are the development of national financial infrastructures, the expansion of trade in national currencies, and the strengthening of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with like-minded countries.

The importance of work in this area is confirmed by the experience of the *Russian Federation*, which faced comprehensive financial sanctions, restricted access to international payment systems and the disconnection of some banks from SWIFT. Despite the unprecedented campaign of sanctions pressure, financial transactions in the country were not paralysed. Moreover, the existing infrastructure allowed for bilateral settlements in national currencies with partner countries, which helped to ensure macroeconomic stability and avoid economic isolation of the state.

China is also actively working to diversify its international settlements. One of its activities in this area is the internationalisation of the RMB. To achieve this goal, China has: (I) concluded RMB currency swap agreements with central banks of several countries (offshore RMB); (II) started trading of the Chinese currency in foreign markets; (III) allowed direct access of international investors to the Chinese stock market within established quotas; (IV) established the Shanghai Free Trade Zone with simplified rules for currency exchange and use of the RMB in foreign trade. Another important aspect of the PRC's efforts to reduce its reliance on a dollar-centric financial infrastructure is the launch of the first phase of the China International Payment System (CIPS), a cross-border interbank payment system designed to pay in RMB for international settlement and clearing services between financial institutions.

As part of its financial sovereignty, *Iran* has established the System for the Exchange of Financial Messages of Iran (SEFAM). This system is not only a national financial messaging infrastructure, but also allows for cross-border integration with foreign banks, eliminating the need for the politicised SWIFT system and its associated problems. This enabled an agreement between Russia and Iran in 2023 to integrate their national interbank systems, boosting trade and facilitating transactions between residents and non-residents.

Brazil has developed a National Instant Payments Ecosystem (PIX), which contributes to the digitisation of the payments market, reduces transaction costs, improves efficiency and expands access to financial services.

The National Payments Corporation of *India* (NPCI) has established a national payment system (RuPay) and a unified payments interface (UPI). These initiatives aim to strengthen financial inclusion in India and expand cooperation with partner countries. Sri Lanka and Mauritius are already connected to these systems, while the possibility of using them for two-way payments with Russia is also being discussed.

The new technological cycle associated with the active development of artificial intelligence, as well as the improvement of blockchain technologies, has an undeniable impact on the modernisation of the national and international financial infrastructure. This has led to the active digitalisation of the financial sector, a structural economic transformation based on advanced technologies and practices. For example, emerging markets are actively developing central bank digital currencies (CBDCs). Russia's digital rouble, China's e-RMB, Iran's crypto-rial, and the forthcoming Brazilian digital real and Indian digital rupee are all based on decentralised blockchain platforms and could potentially lay the foundation for a diversified and inclusive international financial system. CBDCs are already being used for cross-border payments.

For example, in early 2024, the *UAE* and *China* made the first cross-border payment using the digital dirham through the mBridge system. In the future, the active introduction of the latest technologies into the economies of emerging markets may become a decisive factor in increasing their role in the global economy in the context of the formation of a multipolar world and a new macroeconomic cycle.

Interaction between countries on the diversification of international regulations is not limited to bilateral formats of interaction. Active work is also being carried out within the framework of BRICS, an important interstate association of developing countries.

BRICS Initiatives to Build an Equitable System of Global Governance

The combined GDP of the BRICS countries, measured in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms, has reached 37% of the global economy, surpassing that of the G7 countries. Despite

the West's efforts to prevent the BRICS countries from escaping the middle-income trap and reducing their economic potential, the BRICS countries are demonstrating strong growth in key macroeconomic indicators.

In 2023, the BRICS countries adopted the Johannesburg Declaration, which highlighted the necessity of developing alternative mechanisms for the use of national currencies in international trade in order to reinforce the Global Financial Safety Net. The accession of new BRICS member countries – Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE – presents a unique opportunity to elevate cooperation on the construction of an equitable global governance system to a new level.

It should be noted that in 2019 the Brazilian BRICS presidency has already tried to develop alternatives with the initiative to develop the SPIN (System to Pay Internationally) payment system. It was assumed that the creation of a cross-border payment system in the BRICS countries would make it possible to abandon the use of relations with correspondent banks in the process of payments and settlements.

In line with the mandate of the Johannesburg Declaration and previous experience within BRICS, the Russian BRICS chairmanship has identified the improvement of the international monetary and financial system as a top priority for 2024. This will result in a report to the BRICS Leaders that will take a comprehensive look at the challenges of the current financial architecture and analyse the possible benefits of enhanced financial cooperation. In particular, as part of the preparation of the report on improving the IMFS, best national and bilateral practices in building alternative settlement channels will be analysed.

As one of the practical multilateral initiatives aimed at ensuring the sustainable economic development of the BRICS countries, the creation of a common multilateral platform – the BRICS Bridge – is being considered in order to ensure equal access of all countries to available financial instruments and settlement mechanisms, to reduce costs, while ensuring a high level of protection of transmitted information. The implementation of this initiative will

create the necessary infrastructure to deepen further integration in the financial sphere of the BRICS countries in order to build a diversified IMFS, which will contribute to increasing the role of the BRICS countries in the global financial system.

In addition, various ways of enhancing multilateral cooperation among BRICS financial infrastructure market participants are being considered. Such cooperation would reduce the monopolisation of financial infrastructure currently controlled by advanced economies through *Euroclear* and *Clearstream*. These two organisations do not fully reflect the interests of the BRICS member countries, which represent large geographical clusters. In this context, the integration of BRICS financial market infrastructure organisations represents a strategic opportunity to enhance economic cooperation, strengthen the position and representation of emerging market and developing countries in the global financial space, and promote market efficiency and encourage innovation.

Therefore, BRICS activities are aimed not only at diversifying international financial settlements and reducing dependence on third countries, but also at strengthening practical cooperation among member economies. The combination of multilateral formats together with the deepening of bilateral cooperation in financial settlements and the development of national payment infrastructures form the basis for successful BRICS cooperation.

This comprehensive approach should give a new impetus to BRICS financial cooperation and be the key to building an inclusive and sustainable world that promotes economic prosperity for all, not just a few.

¹ The GFSN is a set of institutions and mechanisms that provide financial support to countries affected by the financial crisis.

² The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and in the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call to action for all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership.



Georgiy MIKHNO



Acting Director of the Department
for New Challenges and Threats

Together, we Stand United against Terrorism, Corruption and Drugs

Interaction among BRICS countries in the fight against terrorism, corruption and drugs plays a key role in our countries' interstate cooperation.

Effective cooperation and exchange of information in combating the above-mentioned threats will help to reduce crime and strengthen the international security architecture.

The Department for New Challenges and Threats of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation leads two BRICS sectoral formats: the BRICS Counter-Terrorism Working Group (CTWG) and the BRICS Anti-Corruption Working Group (ACWG). Additionally, it assists the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs in the activities of the BRICS Anti-Drug Working Group (ADWG), which is a law enforcement format.

The following sections will provide further details on each of these groups.

BRICS Counter-Terrorism Working Group

The Russian Federation has consistently supported the development of international cooperation against terrorism and extremism, under the central coordinating role of the United Nations, based on international law, without politicisation, hidden agendas or double standards.

Our committed stance on counter-terrorism is based on the need for international cooperation within an established legal framework. We recognise the leading role of states and their competent bodies in combating terrorism. It is unacceptable to use terrorism or terrorist groups as instruments of geopolitics or to interfere in the internal affairs of states, destabilising 'undesirable' regimes. State support for terrorism and the use of terrorist methods by certain countries is also unacceptable.

In these circumstances, we are working to establish productive and specialized communication with the States that are interested in it, both through bilateral channels and in international forums.

The expansion of BRICS to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and UAE is a significant development. This transformation aligns with the formation of a more democratic, just, and multipolar world order, reflecting the cultural and civilizational diversity of the modern world and the right of every nation to control its own destiny. Additionally, BRICS' ability to combat the global terrorist threat has the potential to increase.

We appreciate the words of support and condemnation by our partners regarding the terrorist attack on 22 March at *Crocus City Hall*. It appears that this act of violence was committed by radical Islamists with the support of external forces interested in destabilizing Russia, including Kiev.

In this regard, the potential of the BRICS CTWG is being strengthened. This format is one of the most advanced tracks

of cooperation within BRICS, and we have always advocated that it should remain depoliticized as much as possible and focus on specific practical Counter-Terrorism tasks. In this respect, there is a solid foundation in the form of the BRICS Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Action Plan for its implementation, adopted under the Russian and Indian chairs in 2020 and 2021 respectively.

On September 14, 2016, the CTWG was launched in New Delhi as a new mechanism for cooperation within the BRICS framework. The CTWG was formed following an agreement reached at the third meeting of the BRICS National Security Advisors and High Representatives for National Security in Cape Town in December 2013. Initially, several states declared an absence of direct terrorist threats to their national security, which hindered the establishment of the CTWG. However, these countries later realised the need to unite and fight terrorism together in order to combat it effectively.

The functions of the Secretariat of the CTWG are entrusted to the country holding the BRICS Chairmanship, which convenes at least one meeting of the Group per year at the level of directors of relevant departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is agreed that the chairing country will not hinder the initiatives of the competent authorities of other countries to hold additional events on their territory.

The CTWG's main objectives are: 1) to exchange views on the latest terrorist threats globally and regionally, particularly regarding foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs); 2) to present national experiences and develop expert dialogues on counter-terrorism issues; and 3) to coordinate positions in international multilateral formats, primarily in the UN. The CTWG also promotes better exchange of information, best practices, knowledge and experience among the relevant authorities of the BRICS countries. The CTWG reports on the results of its work to the High Representatives of the BRICS countries responsible for security issues. The CTWG Chair is expected

to prepare a consolidated report on the outcome of the last meeting of the Group.

The main practical outcome of the third CTWG meeting (White River, South Africa, April 19–20, 2018) was the adoption of the Rules of Procedure for the Group, with a draft developed by Russia. The document introduces specific rules and procedures for the functioning of the CTWG and its Secretariat, establishes clear deadlines for the submission and forms of official documents, "holds together" the CTWG's organisational structure, which is in line with its members, as a flexible *umbrella* mechanism for cooperation, with the possibility of creating subgroups for various aspects of collaboration.

During the 4th meeting of the CTWG in Brasilia on 1 and 2 August 2019, the parties agreed on the distribution of leadership roles in the expert subgroups. Today, Brazil chairs the subgroup on building law enforcement capacity, Russia chairs the subgroup on countering FTFs, India leads efforts to combat the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes, China works on preventing radicalisation, and South Africa focuses on countering terrorist financing.

The CTWG held its fifth meeting via videoconference (31 August – 2 September 2020) due to the spread of coronavirus infection. The event was held under the Russian Chairmanship and resulted in an agreement on the text of the BRICS Anti-Terrorism Strategy. This document elevated the BRICS countries' cooperation in this area to a new level. Additionally, the five subgroups of expert practitioners approved in 2019 were inaugurated.

From 26-29 July 2021, the CTWG held its sixth meeting and the first substantive meetings of its subgroups online, under the Indian Chairmanship. Together, the association agreed upon another strong document – the Action Plan for the implementation of the Anti-Terrorism Strategy of the Five, adopted in 2020 under the Russian Chairmanship.

The plan outlines further steps for the association to implement the strategy and expand cooperation in the counter-terrorism sphere as a whole. The Action Plan aims to take cooperation between the five countries in this area to the next level. At the meeting of the Subgroup on Countering FTFs, Russian proposals were approved for the preparation of future studies on this issue that should be supplemented and updated annually. In addition, the organisation of briefings by representatives of relevant UN agencies on the issue for experts of the subgroup during the intersessional period was also approved.

On 19–21 April, the 7th session of the CTWG and meetings of its five subgroups were held under the Chinese chairmanship. A wide range of counter-terrorism issues were discussed in depth with a view to countering terrorist threats and ensuring international peace and security.

The Group's most recent meeting took place in Pretoria from 12–14 June 2023. This was the first in-person meeting since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. During the meeting, it was unanimously agreed to extend the mandates of the Chairs of the CTWG Expert Practitioner Working Sub-Groups for an additional year and to authorize them to carry out the outlined tasks. The rotation of the Chairs will be discussed at the upcoming CTWG plenary meeting, which will be chaired by Russia from 24–26 June 2024.

We believe that our chairmanship of the CTWG in 2024 will be useful. Our country has been at the forefront of the fight against international terrorism for many years and has extensive experience not only in counter-terrorism operations, but also in preventing the factors that lead to radicalisation. We are implementing comprehensive counter-terrorism measures at both the legislative and law enforcement levels. Russia is ready to share its experience and expertise with our BRICS partners.

Our priorities include the harmonious involvement of the new BRICS members in the activities of the CTWG,

the development of a new position paper reflecting the role and place of this format in the international counter-terrorism framework, and further productive exchanges of views in the expert subgroups. Among other things, the Russian chairmanship could be an important step towards the development of compilations of best practices in counter-terrorism, taking into account differences in legislation and law enforcement in the BRICS countries.

BRICS Anti-Corruption Working Group

Fighting corruption is another important area of our work. This is a dynamically developing area of BRICS cooperation. In order to establish sustainable cooperation in this area, including coordination of national approaches to key issues of international cooperation against corruption and mutual support for relevant initiatives, an Anti-Corruption Working Group (ACWG) was established under the Russian Chairmanship in 2015. To date, it has identified key areas for its work, including asset recovery, extradition of corrupt officials and capacity building of practitioners.

It is worth noting that these issues are also of interest to the new BRICS member countries. With this in mind, and taking into account the need to maintain the continuity of the BRICS agenda, Russia has identified as anti-corruption priorities for its Chairmanship this year: improving the efficiency of asset tracing and recovery; practical international cooperation under the UN Convention against Corruption; and anti-corruption education and awareness-raising. Our partners strongly supported them and expressed their willingness to work closely together.

Discussions are currently underway to flesh out the key thematic documents of the ACWG, which will be prepared for the Leaders' Summit in Kazan in October. The main focus is on establishing common positions on strengthening the

international legal regime for asset recovery and removing barriers to effective cooperation between relevant national bodies. It is widely acknowledged that in recent years, countries unfriendly to us have increasingly politicised anti-crime cooperation. We believe it is important to create a common understanding in BRICS of the unacceptability of this practice and to work together to combat it, including by speaking with one voice in other relevant international fora. We already have a good basis for this: common approaches to these issues are set out in a number of BRICS leaders' declarations, the Joint Communiqué of the Heads of National Anti-Corruption Agencies of 2022, as well as the ACG's *Initiative on Denial of Safe Haven to Corruption* adopted in the same year.

We are also planning a number of education and awareness-raising initiatives this year with the support of relevant international organisations. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the International Anti-Corruption Academy are our long-term partners in this area. Indeed, it was Russia, during its previous BRICS chairmanship in 2020, that first proposed this issue as a priority for the association's work. Since then, it has become one of the main areas of our joint activities: a large number of expert initiatives and training sessions have been successfully conducted, the most recent of which was organised at Russia's request and with Russian funding at the UNODC in Vienna last June with the participation of some fifty anti-corruption experts from the BRICS countries.

This year, we will focus on developing distance learning tools on various aspects of anti-corruption for a wide audience, from university students to law enforcement and supervisory officials. We also plan to involve the BRICS countries in the international social advertising competition *Together Against Corruption*, which is organised annually by the Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation. It is important for us not only to develop cooperation with

our BRICS partners in this promising area, but also to make a significant contribution to the implementation of documents and projects initiated by Russia in other forums, in particular the relevant resolutions of the Conference of the States Parties to the UN Convention against Corruption. We are also promoting our experience as best practice in the G20, where the Brazilian Presidency is planning to launch joint training programmes for the first time this year.

We are also interested in exchanging practical experience and knowledge with our partners on various aspects of anti-corruption, and in establishing and developing direct contacts between representatives of relevant agencies. This should be facilitated by face-to-face meetings of the ACWG and a series of expert discussions we have planned for this year. Some of these will be held for the first time in Moscow, which will also be a good opportunity to familiarise our guests with Russian culture.

All these efforts are primarily aimed at strengthening the capacity of states, increasing their internal resources in the fight against corruption and providing them with additional tools that can support the implementation of national anti-corruption priorities. This is what we see as the role of the BRICS sectoral format, which we oversee. The implementation of our Chairmanship programme will contribute to its successful resolution. We are working hard on this together with our partners.

BRICS Anti-Drug Working Group

We see significant potential for the BRICS format in the fight against drugs, facilitated by its expansion to include key countries affected by the global drug problem.

In this regard, the Russian Chairmanship will focus on identifying and combating drug-related crimes committed through the use of information and communication technologies and virtual payment systems.

The relevance of the issue increased significantly during and after the coronavirus pandemic, which changed the international drug control landscape. Closed borders and social isolation of populations made traditional methods of drug trafficking and street sales to the public impossible. Drug criminals quickly adapted their criminal business to the new conditions. Drug trafficking moved to the Internet and its shadowy 'Darknet'. Dangerous substances are delivered to the public by mail and courier services. Payment for drugs is made in cryptocurrencies to anonymous accounts whose owners are virtually untraceable.

The work of law enforcement agencies has become significantly more complicated due to these new trends. It is now necessary to share experiences and synergies not only between neighbouring countries but also between different regions. This is because new technologies have enabled transnational criminal groups to operate across borders.

Our BRICS partners responded enthusiastically to the Russian proposal to jointly present their vision of the problem and ways to address it at the 67th session of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna in March. On 18 March, in the margins of the session, we successfully held an event with the BRICS countries on this topic.

The 7th meeting of the BRICS Anti-Drug Working Group in Moscow on 21–22 May this year will continue the discussion of countering the use of modern technological advances for criminal purposes, including drug propaganda and distribution. As the lead agency in charge of BRICS cooperation in this area, the Russian Ministry of the Interior aims to enhance practical cooperation between law enforcement agencies. This includes increasing the intensity of information exchange, sharing work experience, and national practices to combat drug trafficking.

One promising area could be to hold training sessions, seminars, and round tables with the participation of employees

from interested law enforcement agencies. Russia is willing to share its experience in this field with its partners.

Undoubtedly, the challenges related to drugs in the BRICS nations differ. However, regular communication between the relevant authorities of the BRICS member states on the topic of drugs can improve understanding of the issue, enhance national and regional capacity, and improve rapid response capabilities. Our country firmly believes that such collaboration will be an essential part of the efforts by the global community as a whole to combat the worldwide drug challenge.



Denis ASHIROV



Deputy Head of the Federal Agency
for Youth Affairs

BRICS Youth Movement: Priorities and Growth Points

We create an environment that helps young people in Russia find and realise their dreams and talents. This is how we define our mission at the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs (*Rosmolodezh*).

Today, 37 million young people live in Russia, and the main task of *Rosmolodezh* is to create favourable conditions for young people to take full advantage of the opportunities for development and unfolding of their potential. At the same time, strengthening international youth cooperation and involving Russian youth in projects and programmes with foreign countries is a priority for us.

Despite the positive agenda of the BRICS alliance, young people remain one of the most vulnerable groups, representing about 20% of the world's population. 87% of young people live in developing countries where they face challenges such as limited access to healthcare, education, employment and economic opportunities¹.

In 2023, a survey was conducted among young leaders of the BRICS countries as part of the International Public Diplomacy Forum *InterYes! 3.0*. The survey revealed that young people are concerned about socio-economic issues (unemployment, living standards, access to education) and humanitarian issues (misinformation, intercultural communication, preservation of traditional values). These issues are addressed at our events through consultations and discussions with other countries on the best ways to deal with them.

Cooperation within the BRICS alliance is carried out in three key areas – political and security, economic and financial, and cultural and humanitarian; one of the main elements of the cultural and humanitarian sphere is the youth dimension.

Our colleagues from the BRICS countries agree that youth and their well-being are the basis for building a harmonious society in our countries, so we jointly implement youth projects and programmes aimed at this.

Although the countries of the Association represent different configurations of political and economic institutions, cultures, languages and traditions, our approach to the implementation of youth policy is similar. Each country has an agency responsible for the implementation of youth policy. Together we are building systematic cooperation at bilateral and multilateral levels.

Gradually, cooperation in the field of youth policy is gaining prominence in the declarations and statements of the BRICS Heads of State, and we are now seeing the positive impact of this process.

As early as the second BRICS Heads of State Summit in Brasilia in 2010, young people were identified as one of the vulnerable groups for whom it is necessary to create conditions for sustainable social development, including in the area of employment and labour relations.

Youth cooperation has a special place in the Johannesburg Declaration II, adopted as a result of the XV BRICS Summit. The document highlights the role of youth as a driving force



in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and promoting entrepreneurship.

An important outcome of the South African 2023 Presidency in the area of youth policy was the establishment of the BRICS Youth Council. This decision was endorsed by the Heads of State and Government at the XV BRICS Summit in August 2023.

The BRICS Youth Council is intended to serve as a permanent coordinating body for the development of youth cooperation among the BRICS members. The Council consists of two representatives from each country, one from a government agency responsible for implementing youth policy and the other from a non-profit organisation.

The creation of the Council will emphasise the youth dimension of BRICS interaction and consolidate the responsibility of countries to consolidate their efforts to achieve these goals.

One of the outcomes of the first meeting of the Council, which took place on 8–9 December 2023, each BRICS member state was assigned to one of the thematic working groups (Russia – Education, Science and Training; India – Youth Entrepreneurship; China – Science, Technology, Innovation; Brazil – Health and Sports; South Africa – Youth Community Service and Volunteering).

Due to the expansion of BRICS from 1 January 2024, the BRICS countries decided to invite new member countries to join the Council. The first expanded meeting of the Council was held on 17 April 2024.

As far as the BRICS Youth Summit is concerned, it is worth noting that the Russian initiative to hold it, together with the *adult* summit of heads of state, was an important step in formalising the youth agenda in the BRICS countries.

“BRICS as an association is very valuable to us, it is becoming more important every year. The time for BRICS is now and I look forward to inviting new BRICS members to be at the forefront with us”.

Nitesh Kumar Mishra, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, India

The I Summit was held in Kazan with the participation of more than 200 delegates from the P5 countries. The event focused on five themes: economic, information, humanitarian, scientific and technical, and political cooperation. For the first time, the Summit included a meeting of BRICS ministers and heads of youth agencies, which resulted in the signing of a five-party Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation in the field of youth policy. Thus, the First Summit laid the foundation for the further development of BRICS cooperation in the field of youth policy and defined the format for such events.

Thus, since 2015, the BRICS Youth Summit has been organised annually by the country holding the BRICS presidency. The countries were inspired by Russia's experience



and adopted this practice. Traditionally, the Summit programme includes thematic sessions on various areas of cooperation and a meeting of ministers and heads of agencies responsible for youth policy in the BRICS countries. The agenda is set by the chair. The fact that the summits end with the adoption of a final document, which is then submitted to the main summit for inclusion in the declaration of the heads of state and government, makes it possible to discuss the challenges facing youth at the highest level.

This year's BRICS Youth Summit will be held on 22–26 July 2024. The Summit will include a regular meeting of the BRICS Youth Council, as well as a meeting of ministers and heads of agencies responsible for youth policy. The agenda of the Summit includes activities in five areas of the work of the BRICS Youth Council.

The Summit will be held for the 10th time and will be an anniversary event. The main task for us this time is to invite the

youth of the new member countries to join our big agenda and to show them our experience and efforts in implementing the efforts to promote the youth agenda of the BRICS countries in the world.

The choice of Ulyanovsk as the venue for the summit is due to the fact that one of the priorities of our work in the BRICS Youth Track is to ensure systemic interaction and continuity of the agenda.

The Project Office for International Youth Cooperation in the Russia-BRICS Area is a great help to Rosmolodezh in achieving this task. The Project Office was established in 2020 together with the government of the Ulyanovsk region to ensure systematic and continuous interaction between Russia and the BRICS countries in the field of youth policy. Since 2020, the Project Office has been operating on the basis of the Creative Industries Foundation of the Ulyanovsk Region.

"The Russia – BRICS Project Office is a kind of youth policy institute that is not often found in BRICS countries. We are proud to have a team working on the issue of international youth cooperation at the government level. I would like to have such project offices in all countries".

Diana Kovala, Deputy Director of the Foundation for Creative Industries of the Ulyanovsk Region, Deputy Head of the Project Office for International Youth Cooperation
«Russia – BRICS»

The Project Office organises international events involving young people from BRICS countries, maintains a database of contacts of youth leaders and organisations from BRICS countries, and informs foreign representatives about Rosmolodezh's international events. The Project Office works closely with non-profit organisations and young leaders from the BRICS countries, providing them with advisory support in the implementation of initiatives.

The main task of the Project Office is to promote the BRICS creative goals that will help the countries build

a better future for young people. Building sustainable non-governmental partnerships helps to better reach young people and increase their interest in international engagement.

It is encouraging that the youth of the BRICS countries, having learned from the experience of the Project Office, have concluded that this format of work is needed in all the BRICS countries. In particular, our partners from India and Brazil intend to open similar organisations in the near future.

The Project Office implements both single events and long-term programmes, including International Youth Forum on Public Diplomacy *InterYES!*, BRICS International Youth Camp, BRICS International Volunteers Conference.

The participation of BRICS youth in the World Youth Festival was a striking indicator of the consolidation of BRICS youth on a multilateral platform. The Festival was held in Russia from 1 to 7 March under the auspices of the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin. Among the 10,000 foreign participants, delegates from the BRICS countries made up a significant proportion. I note that all member states of the association, including new countries, were represented at the festival. China, India and Brazil sent the largest delegations.

The International Youth Forum on Public Diplomacy 'InterYes! 4.0' was held online on 16 April 2024. The aim of the forum was to make the youth of the BRICS countries aware of the possibilities of 'second track diplomacy' and to build horizontal links between youth representatives.

150 participants learned about public diplomacy practices in the BRICS countries and analysed cases of young activists and NGOs from different countries. The Forum experts were prominent representatives of governmental and non-governmental organisations from the BRICS countries involved in the development of international youth cooperation.

An important part of the event was the creation of a bank of ideas for more than 20 initiatives to be implemented by multinational youth teams. Priority will be given to educational projects, sports, youth exchanges, cultural events and research.



We pay special attention to the development of youth cooperation in the field of creative industries in the BRICS region. The BRICS International Youth Camp will be held in Ulyanovsk from 21 to 25 August 2024, and we invite artists from the BRICS countries to participate in this event.

Organised by the Project Office since 2021, the main objective of the Camp is to bring together young representatives of BRICS countries, to develop concrete proposals and projects related to the Camp themes and to involve young people in their practical implementation (2021: Business, Creative Industries, Volunteering; 2022: Ecology and Sustainable Development; 2023: Media).

I would like to point out that in our work with the Association countries, it has become clear that young people accept and embrace different formats of interaction. As a rule, our events are expert lectures, forums, conferences, discussions, networking and, most importantly, face-to-face meetings and



excursions. By combining a hybrid format of work and live communication, we build continuous interaction between young people from our countries and from different corners of our planet. This flexibility allows us to stay in touch, to listen and to hear the ideas and aspirations of young people from all over the world.

It is impossible not to say that the youth agenda within the Association is full of different topics. We are talking about the development of volunteering, youth entrepreneurship, education and sustainable development. In this context, I would like to mention the inter-agency and inter-organisational cooperation within Russia, which helps us to provide the 'right' expertise and fill the agenda with the necessary meaning.

In particular, our foreign colleagues always point out that Russian youth work practice is characterised by a high level of professionalism in project management and in the support

of young people. Our colleagues from the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, the TV BRICS media holding and the BRICS YEA help us with this.

This year, we plan to strengthen the interaction between member countries in the field of youth policy and make our cooperation more result-oriented. All the activities included in the BRICS Chairmanship Plan are aimed at developing long-term initiatives and programmes.

In the era of digitalisation and transformation of the global system, the BRICS countries face unprecedented challenges in the field of domestic policies, including youth policy. These challenges can only be met through close, fruitful and mutually beneficial cooperation within the BRICS framework, and youth policy contributes to building deep cooperation for the prosperous development of our countries.

¹ Youth // United Nations: [website]. – URL: <https://www.un.org/ru/global-issues/youth>
(Retrieved on March, 29, 2024.)



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Vanguard of the World Majority: BRICS' New Identity with an Unchanged Basis

Russia's current chairmanship of BRICS comes at a critical time in the development of the international system – a time of struggle between the emerging multipolarity and the West's attempts to maintain its hegemony in world affairs – and the biggest transformation of BRICS itself in its history. In this regard, Russia faces a double challenge: to adapt BRICS to the new composition, to ensure its effectiveness in the conditions of doubling

the number of its member countries; and at the same time to strengthen the role of BRICS in global governance as the vanguard of the world majority represented by non-Western developing countries, thus bringing closer the formation of a non-hegemonic multipolar world order. This is a very difficult task that will require great diplomatic skill and perseverance on the part of the Russian presidency.

First, the BRICS members have become even more diverse in their domestic and foreign policy orientations, and the Association has become even less homogeneous. After the 2023 expansion, it is no longer a group of mainly large non-Western economies, but a structure that includes representatives of different regions and civilisations of the world, including regional rivals (Iran – Saudi Arabia). For the first time, BRICS includes both official allies of the United States (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt) and its official opponents (Russia, Iran). Some of the new BRICS members do not yet fully understand what they can gain from participating in the Association and what added value they can bring to it. The diversity of national interests of the member countries has increased significantly within the ten.

Perhaps the only principle that unites the BRICS nations in their expanded format is the shared vision of a just multipolar world order, free from global hegemony, and the understanding that all member countries, regardless of their size, military and economic power, or internal political regime, are fully sovereign and committed to pursuing independent foreign policies and not subordinating themselves to others. Therefore, all efforts to strengthen this unity and maintain deep cooperation within the group should be based on this fundamental principle.

Second, Russia faces the challenging task of combining *broadening* and *deepening* within BRICS, a feat that very few international organisations have managed. Traditionally, one has precluded the other. (The European Union, whose large-scale enlargement in 2004 led to the stagnation

of the integration process and disrupted progress towards a qualitatively new level of integration, is a good example). However, BRICS has a unique advantage due to its informal nature. Unlike classical international organisations or integration projects, BRICS allows for *flexible geometry* and does not require the same depth of participation of all member states in all cooperation projects. In the new BRICS format, "coalitions of interests" are acceptable, allowing some countries to engage more deeply in certain issues than others, provided no BRICS member objects.

Third, strengthening the group's role in global governance and promoting a multipolar world order should be done without resorting to confrontation with the United States and the wider West. The confrontational policies of the United States towards Russia, China and Iran, and the formation of blocs in Europe, Asia and (less successfully) the Middle East to oppose them, have become one of the central elements of contemporary international relations. The temptation is to respond in kind. Moreover, as the target of a brutal hybrid war orchestrated by the collective West, with no end in sight, Russia would undoubtedly like to cooperate with as many countries as possible on an anti-Western basis.

But such a policy would be counterproductive. The US is seeking a new bipolarity in which the West, united under Washington's leadership, would be confronted by a coalition of China, Russia, Iran, North Korea and possibly Venezuela, Cuba and a few other countries led by Beijing. At the same time, the vast majority of non-Western countries would maintain at least a neutral position. The US believes it can prevail in such a confrontation, largely because of the potential of its many satellites, and the bloc confrontation itself would provide the West with bloc discipline and create an internal core and meaning for US foreign policy.

Moreover, since BRICS is neither a military nor an economic bloc, and since it consists of a large number of

countries with different types of domestic political regimes and foreign policy orientations, it is not a suitable format for bloc confrontation, and the vast majority of member countries do not want to participate in it. The BRICS is not capable of becoming a non-Western analogue of the G7 in the conventional sense. Moreover, since the majority of BRICS countries do not really want to get involved in a confrontation with the United States (as well as with Russia or China) and have a negative attitude towards the global polarisation promoted by Washington, the creation of such an *anti-G7* is hardly possible in principle. The willingness of US satellites to sacrifice their own interests and development for the sake of 'all-Western' interests (i.e. for the sake of US interests and Western hegemony in world affairs) is a great exception in contemporary international relations.

The mission of BRICS – and all its member countries agree on this – is not to contribute to the polarisation of the world but to reduce it, to promote an interconnected and interdependent international system on a non-aligned and non-hegemonic basis, in which states would not be faced with the stark choice of joining one antagonistic bloc or another, and in which common problems and priorities such as economic development and poverty alleviation, food and water security, the fight against international terrorism would be given priority. Therefore, the work within the BRICS to build a new world order, a new system of global governance, and to strengthen the role of the association in it, should be creative rather than confrontational, by building a new ecosystem of political and economic relations among the countries of the Association, as well as between the BRICS and other countries of the World Majority.

The cooperation that the BRICS countries are building with each other and with like-minded countries on bilateral relations and the global agenda, the infrastructure that is emerging as a result of this cooperation, and the position that the BRICS

countries are collectively taking on global issues is much more effective in weakening Western hegemony and the effectiveness of its confrontational policies than the formation of an anti-Western bloc. What is emerging is not a bloc confrontation between a few blocs and the neutral position of the majority, as Washington seeks, but rather the formation of a new system of international economic and political relations within the framework of the entire World Majority and without the West, bypassing it. As a result, sooner or later the West will be forced to face a dilemma: either to abandon the policy of confrontation and attempts to build a world order based on its hegemony, i.e. to become a normal participant in the international system, or to be marginalised.

The Evolution of BRICS: A New Identity with an Unchanged Basis

In the 16 years of its existence, BRICS has undergone a remarkable evolution, significantly changing and acquiring an essentially new identity. In the 2000s, it was formed (still with four members) as an informal association of the four largest developing countries, the fast-growing emerging markets, as they were then called. This is how BRIC appeared at its first summit in Ekaterinburg in 2009, with an agenda focused on economic issues. The entry of South Africa in 2011, whose economy is many times smaller than that of the other BRICS countries, has already started the process of transforming the association into the most prestigious and representative forum of the non-Western world as a whole, representing the interests of developing countries in global governance. Although South Africa joined the BRICS from Africa, it did so primarily because it was the continent's largest economy.

From 2011 to 2022, the BRICS countries have dedicated themselves to deepening and institutionalising cooperation. Although the Association has remained informal, it has created

full-fledged international organisations and development institutions such as the New Development Bank. BRICS cooperation has expanded far beyond the economic sphere and now rests on three pillars: economic and financial, political and security, and humanitarian, covering a wide range of issues and involving a variety of activities at different levels. For example, in addition to the summit in Kazan, some 250 events of various levels and focus are planned under the Russian chairmanship in 2024. BRICS has developed more institutionalised cooperation on some issues, such as the BRICS Working Group on Counter-Terrorism. In terms of breadth and depth of cooperation, BRICS has become far superior to many traditional international organisations.

At the same time, the BRICS countries began to coordinate their approaches and speak from similar positions on global governance and many current issues of world politics and security, increasingly expressing the views of the East and the South. This was expressed in the declarations of the annual BRICS summits, as well as in the statements of many other events held within the framework of the Association, and was reflected in the need to reform global governance, to strengthen the position of developing countries in it, and to reinforce the world order based on international law and the central role of the UN. And as the overall global governance deficit grew as a result of Western policies that were unwilling to share power in regulatory institutions despite the objective change in the balance of power in the world, and that exacerbated global problems with increasingly confrontational policies towards China and Russia, the BRICS voice on global governance issues became more and more attractive to more and more countries.

It became increasingly clear that BRICS was representing the voice of a majority of non-Western countries in the world, and that participation in BRICS offered both prestige and many opportunities to promote national interests. At the same time,

unlike Western structures, BRICS lacks a hegemon and is based on the sovereign equality of states, respect for civilizational diversity and genuine multilateralism, where decisions are not imposed by a hegemon but jointly developed and adopted by consensus.

This success of the BRICS, on the one hand, and the emergence of a specific global context characterised by a sharp increase in the demand for autonomy and subjectivity on the part of many countries of the world, their desire to create a fairer world order and their unwillingness to become hostages of a new great power struggle, prepared the ground for the expansion of the BRICS in 2023. In 2023, some twenty applications for membership were submitted, and the process continued in 2024.

It is no coincidence that such a sharp increase in interest in unification on the part of non-Western countries occurred precisely in the period after 2022, when the USA simultaneously launched a 'hybrid war' against Russia in order to inflict a strategic defeat on it and began a systemic struggle against China, proclaiming it the main strategic rival and the greatest threat, in order to contain its development, weaken it and subordinate it to the US position. This global confrontation, with the explicit aim of maintaining the hegemonic position of the USA in the international system, has spread to all regions of the world (Washington seeks to weaken the positions of China and Russia wherever possible) and has become almost total in terms of the instruments used (sanctions and trade restrictions, pressure on Russia's and China's partners around the world, information warfare, consolidation of anti-Russian and anti-Chinese blocs in Europe and Asia, proxy war against Russia through Ukraine and preparation of Taiwan for a similar role, etc.).

It demonstrated to the whole world the injustice of the model of world order promoted by the USA and its satellites, showing that their goal is not law and order and development

for all, but their own hegemony and their own development at the expense of others, the preservation of the de facto neo-colonial model, where the development of the chosen is achieved at the expense of the exploitation and inhibition of the development of others. It has become clear that the need to fight China, on which the US has a strong consensus, is primarily dictated by the fact that it has become too strong and is already challenging American primacy in a number of areas; that the root cause of the war in Ukraine and the confrontation between Russia and the West was the latter's categorical refusal to take into account Moscow's security interests, its commitment to dominance in Europe, and its desire to force Russia to eventually accept a subordinate and peripheral position in the European security system. The West's position on the Gaza war of 2023–2024 underlined the extent of its hypocrisy on issues of values and world order and showed once again that it is not interested in international law or universal values, which it has repeatedly violated, but in its own dominance.

Moreover, this confrontation has dramatically increased the global governance deficit, exacerbated many transnational challenges and threats, and complicated the development task of many countries around the world. Traditional institutions of global economic and political governance (G20, UN Security Council) have either been paralysed or, like the G7 or the OECD, turned into confrontation mechanisms and are no longer capable of producing global public goods.

Global cooperation on common challenges such as international terrorism has weakened dramatically. Trade restrictions imposed by the West, unilateral (i.e. illegal) primary and especially secondary sanctions, the desire to shift technological and production chains from China to countries loyal to the West, the illegal seizure of Russian property in the form of freezing state and private assets and talk of confiscating them, attempts to administratively regulate

world energy prices (the so-called 'price cap' on Russian oil), – all this has affected the development of the world economy, which has only just begun to recover from the shock of the global pandemic, and consequently the development of many developing countries, increasing threats such as food shortages, inflation and lack of money for development. The new arms race launched by the West and the increase in military spending have exacerbated the lack of resources for development.

The result was a qualitative change in the international environment that the West clearly did not expect. Many non-Western countries, on the one hand, refused to join the confrontation between the USA and its satellites against Russia and China: they did not join the sanctions and began to declare them illegal, especially with regard to secondary sanctions, i.e. the West's attempts to force third countries to comply with its will regarding their relations with the targets of primary sanctions by threatening them with repressive measures. Instead, these non-Western countries maintained or even expanded cooperation with Russia and China. Second, these countries began to significantly strengthen their own agency in world affairs and to assert their desire to participate in decision-making and global governance. It became clear that such participation was essential for their own development and security (they cannot rely on external actors, especially the West, to protect their interests) and to avoid becoming expendable or "collateral damage" in the ongoing struggle between the great powers. Third, non-Western countries have become more proactive in their pursuit of a multipolar and equitable world order. They are actively supporting global governance reform, recognising that such a reformed world order would enhance their security and improve their development prospects.

All of this has shaped the Global Majority: a diverse group of non-Western countries that prioritise sovereignty, seek greater agency in global affairs, advocate a multipolar world

and more equitable global governance in favour of developing countries, and do not support the West's confrontational stance towards Russia and China. However, the Global Majority countries generally do not seek direct opposition to the United States and its allies, nor do they seek to form opposing blocs. Instead, they seek to create a global environment in which Western policies are less damaging and divisive, and to create the conditions for the West to abandon confrontation and move towards constructive engagement within a multipolar framework.

It was this aspiration that led the majority of the world's countries to the BRICS. They did not see it as an alternative bloc to the West, but as a prototype of the world order they would like to see on a global scale, as well as an institution that would help strengthen the security and development of its member countries, promote their interests and a favourable global agenda. Moreover, due to its informal nature, it is much easier to join BRICS than to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, for example. However, the effect in terms of prestige and increased influence in global governance is significant.

The decisions taken at the historic summit in Johannesburg marked a significant shift in the identity of BRICS – from a group of the largest developing economies to a representative vanguard of the global majority and a catalyst for shaping a new world order and a new system of global governance. With the addition of Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Ethiopia, BRICS now encompasses countries with diverse domestic and foreign policy orientations, representing different regions and civilisations. These diverse nations are united by a common desire to enhance their role in global affairs, respect for each other's sovereignty and civilizational diversity, and a vision of a desirable world order at the global level and a more equitable global governance that favours developing countries.

Comprising several major powers without a hegemon, including rivals who, despite competing on regional and practical issues, cooperate on global issues and share a vision of a just world order, and including countries of different civilisations that respect each other's civilizational distinctiveness, BRICS is seen as a prototype of multipolarity. It is a structure that unites the Global South and the Global East on the principles of equality, sovereignty and mutual respect.

The "quantitative" importance of the BRICS in world affairs has also increased significantly. It now accounts for a larger share of global GDP in purchasing power parity terms than the G7 (35.6% versus 30.3%), and the gap is expected to widen. According to Yuriy Ushakov, Assistant to the President of the Russian Federation, *"BRICS accounts for more than a third of the world's dry land (36%), 45% of the world's population (3.6 billion), over 40% of total oil production and about a quarter of global merchandise exports"*^m.

At the same time, the expansion has not changed the fundamental nature of BRICS as an informal, non-bloc group of states without a hegemon. There is no intention, now or in the future, to have a single leader within BRICS, similar to NATO or the G7, who would impose discipline on other members and push them to achieve collective goals. Each BRICS country, old or new, pursues its own national interests in practical matters related to the global economy and politics, which do not always coincide. This reality limits the ability to reach and, crucially, implement collective decisions, an ability that is typically more streamlined within leadership-based institutions. Moreover, following the expansion of BRICS, there are now at least three pairs of regional rivals within the Group: Iran – Saudi Arabia and Egypt – Ethiopia, in addition to the existing China – India relationship.

Therefore, following the expansion of BRICS, it is essential to intensify efforts to reform global governance and promote

a more equitable world order, while recognising the inherent limitations of the Group's nature.

- First, it is unrealistic to expect the BRICS to create international financial institutions and instruments with influence comparable to those controlled by the West, such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank.

- Second, it is unlikely that BRICS would endorse confrontational or coercive measures against other members of the international community, such as the imposition of BRICS sanctions or similar G7-style restrictions. It is unrealistic to expect BRICS to act as a *battering ram* aimed at undermining the influence of the United States and Europe on the global stage. On the other hand, it is no coincidence that Western powers are suspicious of others' intentions, which they often regard as potentially revolutionary or revisionist: even purely innocent actions can pose a threat to Western hegemony, given its modern fragility. Therefore, there is no need to pressure our BRICS partners into actions that could be more destructive for the West – they will naturally become so.

- Third, BRICS is unlikely to take on major global tasks that the West either cannot solve or is unwilling to address because of its self-interest. However, BRICS will be able to create specific mechanisms to address development challenges such as poverty, hunger, environmental issues, crime, terrorism, information security and artificial intelligence, offering alternative approaches and solutions that differ from those of the West.

- Fourth, the BRICS countries should not be expected to achieve results on issues where their national interests diverge for objective reasons related to the achievement of their primary development goals. BRICS was created and is expanding to further strengthen the capabilities of its members, not to weaken them.

Thus, the interest shown in BRICS by the countries of the Global Majority, the risk of global division and the deficit

of global governance caused by the West's desire to maintain its hegemony through confrontation and bloc separation, as well as the new identity that BRICS has acquired through expansion and the limitations associated with its ability to implement collective action, – all this underlines the need for BRICS to position itself as the vanguard of the Global Majority and an example of correct power relations in a multipolar world, as a concentrated expression of a multipolar and multi-civilizational world order, and to strengthen its role in global governance. To achieve this, it is necessary to increase the share of global issues on the BRICS agenda, while maintaining the priority of relations among member states.

In the area of global economic governance, BRICS should prioritise increasing the use of national currencies and building an infrastructure of trade and economic relations between states, including investment and technological cooperation, that is less vulnerable to repressive measures by the West and not dependent on its financial system. This includes developing direct relations between BRICS banks, creating mechanisms for pooling conditional foreign exchange reserves, and establishing an independent payment system using technologies such as digital currencies and block chain. It is crucial to continue to emphasise that the use of economic interdependence as a weapon of geopolitical struggle and the imposition of unilateral sanctions and restrictive measures outside the framework of the UN Security Council for foreign policy purposes is unacceptable.

In the area of politics and security, it is essential to maintain cooperation on common challenges and threats such as international terrorism, extremism and organised crime. This is particularly important as these threats have been re-energised by the West's confrontational policies, which have undermined global cooperation against them. In addition, it is necessary to promote the idea that international security and great power relations depend to a large extent on whether participants in

international affairs adhere to the principle of the indivisibility of security and refrain from enhancing their own security at the expense of others. These principles should guide the creation of regional security arrangements.

In terms of global governance, there is a need to seek rapid reform of the UN Security Council by increasing the representation of developing countries from Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and Latin America. In addition, developing countries should have greater representation in the secretariats of major global organisations and greater rights and influence in sectoral economic institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and WTO.

Finally, especially after enlargement, the BRICS should promote globally the idea of harmony among civilisations, as articulated in one form or another by Russia and China and supported by all other BRICS countries. The group should emphasise, by its own example and through joint statements, the importance of recognising and respecting the diversity of civilisations in the world, promoting peaceful coexistence and cooperation among different civilisations without attempts to impose change on each other, and recognising that no model of development or value system is or will be universally applicable.

¹ Ushakov Yuriy, *BRICS actually expresses the interests of the world majority*. TASS Russian News Agency, March 5, 2024. <https://tass.ru/interviews/20149675>



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Russia's Education and Science Initiatives in the Context of BRICS Cooperation

Russia's cooperation with the BRICS countries in education, science, technology and innovation is currently extensive. It is supported by a solid legal and contractual framework, including agreements on direct partnerships between BRICS educational institutions. In addition, the Government of the Russian Federation annually allocates scholarships for undergraduate and postgraduate students from BRICS member states to study at the expense of the Russian Federation budget. In total, in the academic year 2023/2024, 217 students from Brazil, 20,761 from India, 39,240 from China, 380 from South Africa, 380 from China, 380 from South Africa, as well as 22,730 citizens of the candidate countries (Egypt, Iran, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia) are studying at Russian universities in higher education programmes.

The institutional framework for cooperation in the field of education within the BRICS association includes annual meetings of Ministers of Education from the member states, relevant senior officials, as well as a meeting of the International Governing Council of the BRICS Network University. During these events in 2023, new agreements were reached and initiatives were announced in the field of education, which Russia, as chair country, intends to implement jointly with its partners in 2024.

The aim is to create a mechanism for the recognition of qualifications in the BRICS region. In this regard, it is necessary to develop an architecture for cooperation on the recognition and equivalence of academic qualifications. To coordinate this work, an expert working group will be established to hold consultations, take concerted decisions and exchange reliable information between relevant ministries, educational organisations and BRICS professional associations on the recognition of qualifications for both further education and employment. In the future, this platform will be able to focus on the development of an umbrella document to ensure comparability of education within BRICS – the so-called BRICS Qualifications Framework. Similar instruments of automatic recognition are effectively used in the framework of cooperation between a number of international organisations and associations, such as APEC, ASEAN, SADC and others.

It is our intention to extend the scope of our activities in order to create a unified database of educational programmes and scientific publications. Furthermore, we plan to develop work plans for multilateral scientific and educational laboratories and centres.

Another ambitious goal, endorsed by the BRICS member countries at their Education Ministers Meeting in South Africa in 2023, is the creation of an alternative rating system for BRICS educational organisations. This is because existing international ratings are created in the West and often have

a biased approach. It is hoped that this new system will provide a fair and accurate ranking. It will be a comprehensive system for evaluating universities worldwide, based on scientific criteria and taking into account the specifics of each country's education system.

It seems that the creation of an alternative rating will provide an opportunity to rethink the assessment of the educational and scientific potential of the Association's higher education institutions, taking into account the socio-cultural and economic characteristics of its member countries. The Moscow International University Ranking *Three University Missions*, conducted annually by the Russian Union of Rectors, is considered one of the conceptual options for a new BRICS ranking system. Relevant instructions to develop this initiative were given by the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, at a meeting of the Science and Education Council on February 8, 2024. This issue will be discussed in detail within the working group and at the BRICS Rectors' Forum with the participation of experts from BRICS countries in the field of education.

We are also working with our colleagues in the relevant ministries of the Union to explore the possibility of organising an international Olympiad for BRICS students. We are convinced that it will open new opportunities for talented young people from the BRICS countries and will be in demand at the venue, also taking into account its geographical expansion. It is envisaged that the winners and laureates of the Olympiad will be able to study at universities in the BRICS countries free of charge. In the first stage, we plan to focus on masters programmes. In the future, it is possible to implement the programme for access to bachelor's degree programmes as well.

We also face an important task of expanding the composition and areas of education of the key educational cluster, namely deepening scientific and educational

cooperation among the consortium of universities participating in the BRICS Network University project. The accession of universities from new member states to the Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of the BRICS Network University takes into account the situation in the dynamically changing world and thus expands the horizons of cooperation.

One of the projects proposed by the Russian Federation within the framework of the development of the BRICS Network University is the creation of the BRICS Basic Scientific Journal on the basis of the Patrice Lumumba Peoples' Friendship University of Russia. We hope that the journal will become an international platform for publications, thematically focused on the key competencies of university authors and promotion of the results of scientific activities, as well as maintaining the reputation of the BRICS Network University.

In order to develop a strategy for education that meets the needs of the economies, we plan to discuss and develop a map of the basic competencies of the BRICS countries that will be in demand in the labour market in the coming decades.

Another avenue of cooperation within the BRICS Network University is the development of inter-university scientific collaboration through international thematic groups (hereafter referred to as *ITGs*). These groups were established by the memorandum of understanding on the establishment of the BRICS network university and are dedicated to the following fields of knowledge: energy, computer science and information security, BRICS studies, ecology and climate change, water resources and pollution treatment, and economics.

Within the framework of the *ITG*, the member universities of the BRICS Network University carry out numerous joint educational and scientific-methodological activities and events: conferences and competitions, forums, case championships,

cycles of online lectures, summer/autumn/winter schools for students, publish joint publications, collections, organise the *Day of Science* of the BRICS Network University and many others.

This contributes to the development of academic mobility of students and staff, and strengthens cooperation in scientific and public diplomacy, which in turn serves as a bridge between the BRICS countries. It is essential that this open exchange of knowledge and ideas is sustainable, as it takes place independently of geopolitical changes. In this sense, its importance can hardly be overestimated.

These formats are flexible enough to be extended and scaled up to groups of countries. In particular, the creation of distributed student research and education labs, student incubators and international project teams. Increased knowledge sharing will certainly strengthen the influence of the BRICS. In this regard, it would be advisable to further develop and implement a programme of multilateral exchanges of leading teachers and professors.

At the same time, science, which is inextricably linked to education, also serves as a tool to improve the quality of human life, while technology and innovation provide knowledge-intensive solutions to key challenges facing the world. Therefore, the BRICS cooperation pays special attention to the Science, Technology and Innovation track (hereinafter referred to as *BRICS STI*), which covers key issues on the global international agenda.

BRICS cooperation in this area has a long history and has gained momentum over the past decade, including through the signing of the Memorandum on Cooperation in the Field of Science, Technology and Innovation between the Governments of the BRICS Member States in Brazil on 18 March 2015.

This track is currently one of the most dynamically developing and richest areas of multilateral interaction. BRICS

STI senior officials and ministers meet annually and thematic working groups meet regularly. The scope of activities is quite broad. Currently, there are 13 thematic working groups of the BRICS STI in various fields. The full list of areas of activity covers a wide range of scientific topics of mutual interest to the partners: from astronomy to biotechnology and biomedicine, including human health and neurosciences. Working groups and initiatives have been successfully coordinated by the Steering Committee for five years.

Interaction among BRICS countries involves a variety of scientists and research groups from different regions of Russia and other BRICS countries. Regional representation is a characteristic feature and strength of our STI ecosystem. It is particularly valuable for us and our partners that BRICS relations are developing both at the governmental level and through annual large-scale thematic events, such as the *BRICS Young Scientists Forum*, the *BRICS Young Innovators Prize*, the International Academic Conference *Foresight and Science, Technology and Innovation Policy*, and the BRICS Academies of Sciences Meeting.

The *BRICS Young Scientists Forums* have been organised annually since 2016 to ensure the development of cooperation between young scientists, to help form new youth research groups, to showcase the opportunities of the countries and to help the younger generation develop careers, education, research and entrepreneurship.

Undoubtedly, an urgent issue for any researcher is the possibility to implement the results of work in the real sector of the economy, to improve technological processes. In this regard, the *BRICS Young Innovators Competition* has been held annually since 2018 on the side-lines of the *BRICS Young Scientists Forum*. The competition is designed to reward promising young researchers from BRICS countries for pioneering initiatives that can contribute to the socio-economic development of the countries of the bloc, and to

support promising projects. The organisers of the competition are developing a specific approach to selecting applications based on the most pressing issues on the BRICS STI agenda. For example, in 2023, the 6th *Young Innovators Competition* accepted entries with ground-breaking initiatives in the areas of manufacturing modernisation, agriculture, mining and the circular economy. In 2023, Russia's first victory (1st place in the competition) was brought by physicist Dmitriy Yudin from the *Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology*. The scientist and his team received the award for their project to create a non-contact vibration diagnostic method for industrial equipment based on an event camera. This technology makes it possible to detect malfunctions in the operation of industrial equipment. This development is important for the development of industry and has already been tested by large domestic companies such as *Sibur* and *Severstal*.

However, STI cooperation would be difficult without strong support from relevant ministries and foundations. The implementation of joint projects is based on the similarity of interests, complementarity of scientific tasks and approaches, generation of new ideas. In order to intensify project activities, the BRICS STI Framework Programme was approved by the Moscow Declaration on 28 October 2015. During the 7 years of its existence, 5 calls for multilateral applied projects with the participation of BRICS countries were held with the support of more than 10 foundations and agencies. 138 projects were supported, 106 of them with Russian participation, and 9 projects involved teams from all five countries.

Project support is ongoing. At present, the national review phase is underway for applications for the sixth competition on adapting to climate change and mitigating its effects.

Based on the successful practice of implementing joint scientific initiatives, the BRICS countries have agreed on a mechanism for launching BRICS Flagship STI projects,

which will be characterised by their scale and strategic importance. It is planned to launch the initiative during the Russian Chairmanship in 2024.

All of the above is helping to deliver tangible results and strengthen BRICS cooperation. For example, based on the decision of the *BRICS Working Group on Ocean and Polar Science and Technology* to conduct joint expeditions on research vessels and stations, a joint expedition took place in 2022 off the coast of Brazil at the mouth of the Amazon River to study the pathways of plastic debris from the river mouth to the world's oceans. Russia was represented by scientists from the *P.P. Shirshov Institute of Oceanology* of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The expedition provided rare scientific data on this unique area of the ocean and became a notable milestone in the development of international scientific cooperation between countries.

In the context of diversifying cooperation during our Chairmanship, I would like to highlight Russian initiatives such as the *BRICS Advanced Network of Global Research Infrastructures*, the *BRICS Network Centre for Materials Science and Nanotechnology* and the *BRICS Virtual Institute of Photonics*. Each of these initiatives offers opportunities for joint research programmes and the development of innovative solutions in various fields of science and technology, such as materials science, nanotechnology and optoelectronics.

For example, in 2018, the *BRICS Working Group on Research Infrastructures and Megascience Projects* launched a digital platform, the *Global Network of Research Infrastructures*, for international teams to work on megascience projects, share scientific data and open access to it. It currently brings together 30 operational and under-construction research facilities in the BRICS countries, 13 of which are located in the Russian Federation, including the *Novosibirsk Free Electron Laser (FEL)*, the *NEVOD experimental complex* at MEPhI, the *NICA accelerator complex* in Dubna, the *PIK reactor* in Gatchina, and the

TOKAMAK facility in Troitsk. Today, through this platform, scientists from BRICS countries can learn about opportunities to conduct research at unique scientific facilities, as well as about programmes and access for BRICS laboratories to work at the research facilities themselves.

Thanks to another key Russian initiative, the creation of the *Network Centre for Materials Science*, which brings together leading universities and scientific organisations of the BRICS countries on a voluntary basis, materials science continues to lead the field with the most applications in the competition for research projects. The main objective of the *Network Centre* is to unite the efforts of leading universities and scientific organisations in training highly qualified personnel in the field of materials science for scientific research and the innovation economy, to promote academic exchanges of students, teachers and scientists, and to identify the most promising areas of basic and applied research and development in the field of materials science and nanotechnology.

Other initiatives include the *BRICS Integrated Centre for Innovation Cooperation in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and High Performance Computing Systems*, the *BRICS Network of Science Parks, Technology Business Incubators and SMEs* (iBRICS Innovation Network) and the *Framework Programme for Cooperation of the BRICS Network of Centres for Technology Transfer*.

In the year of the Russian Chairmanship, systematic work will be carried out in all the declared vectors: the plan for science, technology and innovation includes more than 20 events. In addition to the annual work, we have focused on the possibility of organising an internship and exchange programme for young scientists within the BRICS framework, as well as international land and sea expeditions, including along the Northern Sea Route, and the establishment of a BRICS Geographers' Day.

Another priority area for Russia's BRICS chairmanship is cooperation on the environmental agenda. As part of

the development of the *Carbon Polygons* project, we plan to discuss the creation of *climate farms* – mirror research sites for crucial climate-friendly research on land restoration and water conservation.

It is also proposed that in 2024 we focus on and initiate cooperation in the humanities (history, linguistics, sociology, etc.).

Thus, the interaction of the BRICS countries in the field of science, technology and innovation is very diverse and multifaceted. It is successfully implemented at various levels (governmental, academic, promotional) and has a solid foundation for successful expansion and development in the future.

In turn, the uniqueness of the BRICS countries, their high degree of identity and adherence to a specific development path, as well as their common challenges in science and education, create many opportunities for sharing knowledge and experience, learning from each other and developing joint initiatives. All this contributes to the search for effective approaches to global challenges in order to create favourable conditions for fruitful cooperation in the humanitarian sphere, as well as to maintain stable existence and sustainable development.



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International information security on the BRICS agenda

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) determine to a large extent the dynamics and possibilities of modern human life. In fact, they have become the main driver of progress at the current stage of human development. However, there is a downside: as dual-use tools, ICTs are widely used for malicious purposes – for computer attacks, espionage, stealing users' personal data, organising criminal and terrorist activities, and destabilising the socio-political situation of entire states.

All these challenges are relevant to the BRICS countries, which are constantly experiencing the negative consequences of malicious activities using ICTs. The statistics for the last three years speak for themselves¹. One third of all cyberattacks in the Asia-Pacific region occurred in China (16.75%) and India (16.15%). Nearly 60% of all such attacks in South America occurred in Brazil, and South Africa had the highest number of attacks in Africa. Critical infrastructure, public sector and defence industries were targeted.

Each of the BRICS countries has its own unique approach to protecting its digital environment, based on national legislation. At the same time,

all participants share the understanding that, given the transnational nature of ICTs, true security of national information resources cannot be achieved without constructive cooperation and sharing of experiences in this area. Therefore, international information security issues are firmly on the BRICS agenda and have been discussed at the highest level for more than 10 years. The 2013 eThekweni Declaration² of the BRICS Summit for the first time noted "the importance of ensuring security in the use of ICTs *through universally accepted norms, standards and practices*" and emphasised the need for BRICS countries to contribute to building a peaceful, secure and open information space.

In 2013, the BRICS High Representatives in charge of security issues decided to establish the BRICS Working Group (WG) on Security in the Use of ICTs as the main expert platform for discussing this topic (the mandate was enshrined in the 2015 Ufa Declaration³). The BRICS Roadmap for Practical Security Cooperation in the Use of ICTs is a key reference point for joint work in this area.

Interaction within the Working Group, based on the principle of consensus, is developed in the following areas:

- Exchange of information on information security threats and national approaches, strategies and legislation in the field of ICT security;
- Coordination of BRICS interaction on ICT security issues in international fora;
- Interaction through BRICS Computer Emergency Response Teams (CERTs);
- Strengthening cooperation between competent authorities on security in the use of ICTs, including countering the use of these technologies for criminal purposes and sharing best practices in the field of information infrastructure protection;
- Strengthening digital capacity;
- Conducting joint research and establishing BRICS scientific and research exchange mechanisms.

On 16–17 April, the 10th anniversary meeting of the Working Group was held in Moscow under the Russian chairmanship, with

the first participation of delegations from Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates. The meeting confirmed the mutual interest of all participants in the Group in enhancing co-operation to ensure international information security. An important practical outcome is the decision to include new members in the BRICS Points of Contact Directory for the exchange of information on computer attacks/incidents. Russian proposals to strengthen the legal and regulatory framework for cooperation and to establish dialogue within the academic community were positively received by the partners⁴.

The event allowed for a substantive exchange of views on all aspects of the international agenda related to information security. In this area, the BRICS countries are united by a common commitment to the exclusively peaceful use of ICTs, to preventing the militarisation of information space and conflicts in it, and to bridging the digital divide. They reaffirmed their willingness to continue to work closely together on international information security issues within the UN, in particular within the Open-ended Working Group (OEWG). It was also noted that all partners are interested in preserving a single universal negotiating mechanism on these issues, allowing all states, without exception, to participate in negotiations on an equal footing and to directly influence decision-making through the principle of consensus.

The meeting also recognised that in the area of combating information crime, the BRICS countries have made significant progress in drafting the first comprehensive convention on combating the use of ICT for criminal purposes under the auspices of the United Nations, within the framework of the relevant ad hoc committee. At this crucial stage of the negotiations, it is important that the members of our group, as the initiators of the process, do their utmost to agree on an action-oriented treaty. The goal is to achieve a comprehensive document that will lay the foundation for fruitful international law enforcement cooperation in the fight against information crime.

In general, the Working Group meeting showed that BRICS has significant potential for further development of

cooperation between our countries in the field of information security. The association in its new configuration is a driving force in building a fair multipolar world order based on equal, mutually respectful dialogue and balance of interests. In the information space, our common approach is based on respect for the fundamental norms of international law, first and foremost the principles of sovereign equality of states and non-interference in their internal affairs.

It is crucial to promote enhanced interaction among BRICS countries in the field of information security. Working in this format provides a unique opportunity for direct, trust-based dialogue on aspects of international information security that are most relevant to our states, and to outline further joint steps to maintain peace, security and stability in the information space.

¹ Cybersecurity in the world: situation in regions and countries // URL: <https://globalcio.ru/discussion/36782/> (Retrieved on 7 May 2024.)

² EThekwin Declaration of the V BRICS Summit of 27 March 2013 // URL: <https://www.special.kremlin.ru/supplement/1430/> (Retrieved on 7 May 2024.)

³ Ufa Declaration of the VII BRICS Summit, 9 July 2015 // URL: <https://www.static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/YukPLgicg4mqAQly7JRB1HgePZrMP2w5.pdf/> (Retrieved on 7 May 2024.)

⁴ On the 10th meeting of the BRICS Working Group on Security in the Use of ICTs // URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1944857/ (Retrieved on 7 May 2024.)



Anna NESTEROVA



Chairwoman of the Russian part of the
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Women Entrepreneurship in BRICS: Joint Projects for the Benefit of the People

Women's entrepreneurship in the BRICS region is an important factor for economic development and social stability. The development of this sector helps to strengthen the position of women in business and contributes to economic growth, job creation, the formation of a middle class, market development and GDP growth in the BRICS countries.

The accession of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to BRICS on 1 January 2024 creates conditions for the development and implementation of new and existing programmes and initiatives in the area of women's entrepreneurship. One such project, supported by the governments of the BRICS countries, is the BRICS Women's Business Alliance (WBA), a platform for dialogue among women entrepreneurs, to be launched in 2020.

According to the *Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs 2022*, the share of businesses owned or managed by women in the BRICS countries is about 23 percent. One of the key objectives of the BRICS Women's Business Alliance is to increase the proportion of women entrepreneurs to 50 percent by 2030.

The Russian Federation is the leader in this indicator among the countries of the Association: 45% of the total number of traders in our country represent the fairer half of humanity. Brazil is in second place (37%), followed by China and South Africa with 29% each.

The idea of creating the BRICS Women's Business Alliance was proposed at the First International Congress of Women of the SCO and BRICS in Novosibirsk on 4 July 2017 in the presence of the Chairperson of the Federation Council Valentina Matviyenko. The initiative to create the BRICS Women's Business Alliance was supported by Russian President Vladimir Putin and subsequently by the Heads of State of Brazil, India, China and South Africa. The BRICS WBA was officially launched in 2020 under Russia's BRICS chairmanship.

One of the main drivers of growth in women's entrepreneurship is increased access to education and business opportunities. The level of education among women in the BRICS countries is gradually increasing, allowing them to better understand business processes and develop management and decision-making skills. Sharing experiences and achievements in science and technology creates a modern international education and business space and expands opportunities for women's entrepreneurship.

Despite the positive trends, women's entrepreneurship in the BRICS countries still faces a number of challenges. These include limited access to finance, insufficient social support and difficulties in business regulation. There is no point in dividing these difficulties along gender lines – the barriers are the same for both men and women.

The mission of the WBA is to create opportunities for BRICS women entrepreneurs to realise their potential by launching joint projects, sharing best practices and successful experiences of foreign partners. That is why we are now working hard to launch the digital platform of the Alliance, which will become a unified information space for BRICS women entrepreneurs. The demo version has already been launched at www.bricswomen.com, and the official launch will take place at the BRICS Women's Entrepreneurship Forum to be held in Moscow on 3–4 June.

The platform will combine the role of an *international showcase* of projects, solutions and best practices of women entrepreneurs from BRICS countries, an educational resource for developing their competencies and skills, a communication service for finding business partners, as well as the Alliance's *library* where all relevant information will be openly available. In this way, the platform will help to ensure the seamless integration and immersion of women from Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, UAE and Saudi Arabia into the Alliance's current agenda.

Targeted Support

According to the Alliance 2023 survey, 67% of women entrepreneurs face a lack of financial support in the early stages of their business. We believe one way to address this is to develop a system for investing in women's start-ups. In many countries, investing in women's start-ups is already part of corporate sustainability policies. This experience can be extended to the BRICS countries.

There are currently around 500,000 start-ups in the Association's countries, with India accounting for the largest number (around 290,000). India is followed by China, Brazil and the United Arab Emirates. In Russia, the number of start-ups today is about 17,000. We have room to grow.

That is why this year the Alliance is launching the BRICS Best Women's Startups Competition, which aims to select the most effective women's projects that have an innovative component and significant commercialisation potential, with a view to scaling them up in the BRICS countries.

Space for Dialogue

The BRICS Women's Business Alliance was originally created to develop and implement joint multilateral projects. Platforms such as the BRICS WBA allow Russian businesswomen to engage in direct dialogue with their counterparts from the BRICS countries, to learn first-hand about the needs of foreign markets and to understand what foreign partners want: what kind of product, what kind of service.

We see opportunities for our business in agriculture and food security, healthcare, creative industries and innovative development. A number of our women have already been working on setting up joint ventures and production facilities with partners from the BRICS countries, and this year our aim is to make these projects multilateral.

We pay special attention to the development of business cooperation through the study and understanding of the unique features of the cultures and traditions of the BRICS countries. In 2023, the BRICS WBA launched the BRICS Cultural Club, within which we are developing a guidebook on business etiquette in the BRICS countries and video training courses for entrepreneurs planning to work with foreign partners from the BRICS countries. We are also preparing a white paper on the care economy. The School of Financial Literacy and Financial Security for Women has developed courses for Russian, South African and Ethiopian audiences.

We have done a lot of work over the past four years. In particular, last year, on the initiative of our South African

colleagues, we launched the global BRICS television network *MPower Channel* and opened regional Alliance Centres in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Mozambique.

Our Indian colleagues initiated the publication of the *Compendium of Success Stories of Women Entrepreneurs*. Such projects allow us to share our experiences and create a database of case studies that can be used by our colleagues in Alliance countries.

Russia is systematically working to create equal conditions for the self-realisation of all citizens. In 2023, the National Strategy of Actions for Women for 2023–2030 was adopted, the main goals of which include adherence to the principle of equal rights of men and women in various spheres of life, increasing the economic independence and political activity of women in our country, as well as preventing discrimination against women.

The Global Platform of the Eurasian Women's Forum has become the leading event in the field of support for women and female entrepreneurship. The business event is held every 3 years and gathers on its platform the achievements of recent years in the field of development of women's entrepreneurship, support of women's leadership, family, cultural and educational projects. Now in its fourth year, the Forum is rightly recognised around the world as an international platform for bringing people together and finding common ground despite the challenges of our difficult times.

At the initiative of our Chinese partners, we published the *BRICS Women's Development Report* and organised the *BRICS Women's Innovation Contest* in 2020, initiated by President Xi Jinping. This work allows us to dynamically assess the processes we are witnessing in women's entrepreneurship and related economic activities.

In 2023, the BRICS Women's Business Alliance launched a project to establish the BRICS Centre for Labour and

Educational Mobility. Russia, South Africa and Ethiopia have already signed trilateral agreements to open offices of the centre.

Over the years, we have developed an understanding of how we can be useful to each other and in which areas cooperation is most promising.

In the year of the Russian Federation's BRICS chairmanship, the Alliance plans to organise around 20 events, which together should have a synergistic effect and give impetus to international interaction, as well as ensure the successful integration of new members of the association.

The Alliance was founded relatively recently, in 2020, but since then we have managed to create a like-minded community of women entrepreneurs from the BRICS countries. A community that continues to grow, develop and move forward.



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The Dichotomy of Trade and Investment in the BRICS Economies

The BRICS countries have set ambitious goals, with the objective of transforming the Group into a pivotal force for economic stability and sustainable growth. Trade and investment cooperation are crucial in achieving this goal. Despite notable progress in individual national GDP indicators, fostering more intensive and balanced trade and investment cooperation among BRICS members could substantially boost economic growth.

Many broad indicators of the BRICS countries, such as their share of world GDP, production and trade, are showing positive momentum, signalling the group's enhanced global standing. Moreover, relations between BRICS countries are developing in various fields, including politics, economics, culture and education. Many indicators of intra-BRICS interaction are also on the rise. However, not all indicators show equally robust growth rates.

In the theory and practice of international economic interaction between different countries, it is generally accepted that the development of trade relations leads to close investment cooperation and contributes to the generation of reciprocal investment flows into the economies of trading partners. Thus, the US, China and the European Union are the recognised leaders in both international trade and international investment. They actively trade with each other and invest in each other's economies. However, the practice of interaction between the BRICS countries reveals the phenomenon of a different speed of dynamics of flows of goods and investments. While trade turnover between many BRICS countries is growing at high rates, investment flows are not increasing at the same pace.

The dynamics of trade and investment development over the BRICS years are characterised by high rates of unevenness, both between individual countries of the association and in the absence of a noticeable correlation between trade and investment growth in different periods of the last two decades.

Foreign Trade in BRICS

It is important to note that the role of foreign trade in the development of the BRICS economies has varied significantly over time. Over the past 20 years, the importance of foreign trade in the BRICS economies has changed in different directions (Diagram 1)¹. In South Africa and Brazil, the share of trade in relation to GDP has grown significantly. For Russia and India, this indicator remained virtually unchanged during this period. In contrast, for China it declined, reflecting a shift in the relative importance of internal factors in the national economic development process.

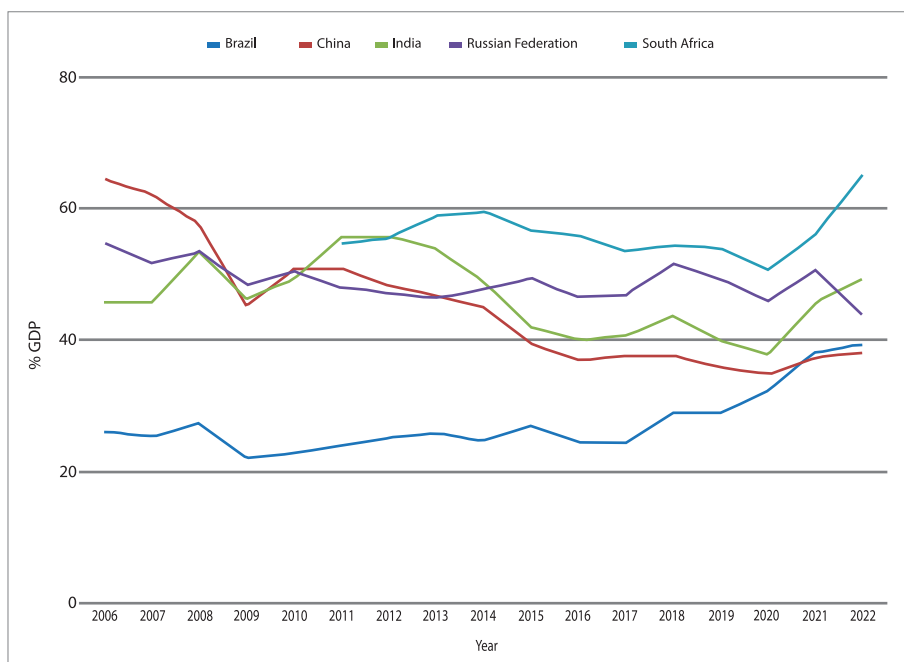
The addition of new countries to BRICS, effective 1 January 2024, is contributing to a divergence in national approaches regarding the importance of foreign trade for national economic development within BRICS. Among the new Group's members, the United Arab Emirates stands out significantly from the original Five due to the

high role of foreign trade in its national economy, which has grown from 125% to almost 160% of GDP over the last decade².

This figure is approximately three times higher than the average for all other BRICS members, whose share of foreign trade stands at around 50% of GDP. In contrast, another new BRICS member, Ethiopia, has the lowest share of foreign trade in GDP at around 25%³.

Diagram 1.

The changing role of foreign trade in the BRICS (5 countries) economies (Trade-to-GDP ratio, %)



Source: Data from the World Bank website (<https://databank.worldbank.org/BRICS-COUNTRIES2/id/2577ded4>)

Although the role of foreign trade in China's GDP growth declined significantly from around 60% to around 40% after the global financial crisis of 2008–2009, intra-BRICS trade (5 countries) has remained predominantly focused on China and can be described as China-centric. China has been and remains the most important

trading partner for Russia and other BRICS countries such as India, Brazil and South Africa. The volume of China's exports and imports (in US dollars) with these countries is significantly higher than the volume of trade between the other BRICS countries.

If we analyse the intra-BRICS trade dynamics over the course of its existence among the original five members, it is evident that there has been a significant increase in both exports and imports for all BRICS countries in their trade with China, except for India's exports to China, which have remained relatively unchanged over the years.

China's exports to Brazil, South Africa and India will more than double between 2010 and 2023⁴. Exports to the Russian Federation will increase by a factor of 3.7 (from \$29.612 billion to \$111.057 billion). And Brazil and South Africa's exports to China will more than triple over the same period. The Russian Federation's exports to China alone increased almost fivefold (from \$25.913 billion to \$128.484 billion)⁵.

Between 2006 and 2022, Brazil and Russia's trade with partners other than China remained relatively stagnant. Looking at the trade volume of Russia and Brazil within the BRICS, we actually observe significant growth, mainly driven by increased trade with China. China is also the main importer for India, although significant export growth did not begin until 2020⁶. Russia, in particular, has increased its exports of goods and services to India by almost 6.5 times (from \$6.226 billion in 2019 to \$40.628 billion in 2022)⁷. In addition, in 2020–2021, India began to export more to Brazil and South Africa, accompanied by a decline in India's exports to China. South Africa mainly trades with China, although it starts to increase its imports and exports with India from 2021 onwards. However, trade with the rest of the BRICS remains flat. China has been actively increasing its exports and imports to Russia and Brazil since 2015–2016⁸.

Thus, intra-BRICS trade volumes increased significantly over the period considered, but this growth was uneven and did not involve all pairs of partners in the then G5. The largest growth was mainly due to the intensification of trade between certain partner pairs: China and Russia, China and Brazil and Russia and India⁹.

Table 1.

**The role of the BRICS (10 countries) states in mutual
trade in 2022–2023¹⁰**

- First most important trading partner
- Second most important trading partner

Exporters and importers		Share in exports and imports of the BRICS states									
		Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa	UAE	Iran	Egypt	Ethiopia	Saudi Arabia
Brazil	Import		4,20%	2,90%	22,10%	0,20%	0,50%	0,10%	0,20%	0,01%	1,5%
	Export		0,40%	1,40%	30,80%	0,50%	1%	1,30%	0,70%	0,01%	0,9%
Russia	Import	0,47%		1,14%	29,80%	0,10%	1,30%	0,30%	0,30%	0,01%	0,1%
	Export	2,60%		6,80%	19,20%	0,10%	1,40%	0,30%	0,60%	0,01%	0,4%
India	Import	1%	5,50%		14%	1,50%	7,40%	0,10%	0,40%	0,01%	6,3%
	Export	2,20%	0,60%		3,40%	1,90%	6,40%	0,40%	0,90%	0,10%	2,2%
China	Import	4,80%	5%	0,70%		1,30%	1,50%	0,20%	0,10%	0,01%	2,5%
	Export	1,70%	3,30%	3,50%		0,70%	1,60%	0,30%	0,50%	0,10%	1,3%
South Africa	Import	1,30%	0,50%	7%	20,50%		3,70%	0,01%	0,10%	0,01%	2,9%
	Export	0,40%	0,30%	4,60%	11,30%		2,30%	0,01%	0,01%	0,01%	0,4%
UAE	Import	0,90%	1,90%	6,50%	16%	1,10%		0,10%	0,50%	0,10%	2,2%
	Export	0,10%	0,50%	4,90%	2%	0,40%		1,30%	1,10%	0,10%	5,4%
Iran	Import	1,10%	2,60%	4,60%	26,50%	0,01%	30,70%		0,01%	0,01%	0,01%
	Export	0,35%	1,10%	3,40%	37%	0,01%	9,20%		0,01%	0,01%	0,01%
Egypt	Import	3,60%	4,30%	4,40%	15%	0,16%	3,40%	0,01%		0,01%	9%
	Export	0,60%	1,20%	3,80%	3,70%	0,21%	4%	0,01%		0,21%	5,1%
Ethiopia	Import	0,12%	0,27%	14%	30%	1%	3,40%	0,01%	3,50%		3,2%
	Export	0,01%	0,45%	3%	4,30%	0,60%	6,70%	0,08%	0,11%		8,8%
Saudi Arabia	Import	1,9%	1,1%	5,5%	21%	0,6%	6,3%	0,01%	3,5%	0,01%	
	Export	1,1%	0,1%	10,2%	16,2%	1%	4,3%	0,01%	3,4%	0,01%	

Sources: Compiled by the authors based on the Trade Map data (<https://www.trademap.org/Index.aspx>)

China is the dominant exporter and importer within BRICS, actively trading with all countries in the group. For almost all BRICS countries, China is either an important or significant partner. However, China's trade importance as a market for exports from the new BRICS members is less significant. For example, China accounts for only 4.3% of Ethiopia's exports, 3.70% of Egypt's and 2% of the UAE's. Unlocking the export potential of national goods is a structural challenge for these countries, as the high divergence between imports and exports is a serious obstacle to the implementation of financial and economic initiatives within BRICS (e.g. the system of settlements in national currencies).

Trade flows between India, Russia, Brazil and South Africa, while not as large as those with China, show significant potential for growth. India is an important trading partner for all BRICS countries, and for many it is the second most important partner within BRICS after China.

The role of African partners in the imports and exports of other BRICS countries is still insignificant, which may become an important resource for the development of foreign economic relations in the BRICS.

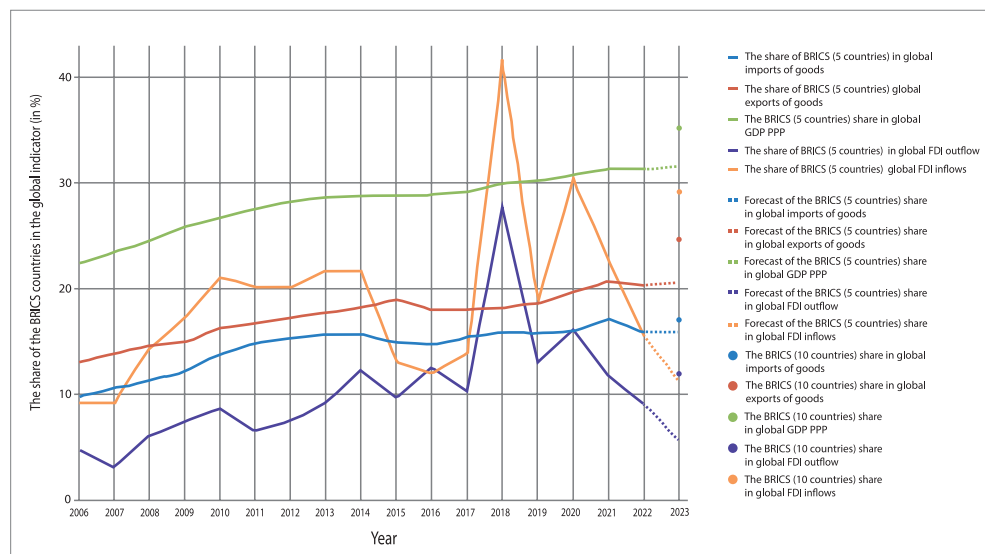
We would like to highlight the role of the United Arab Emirates in the BRICS. This state already has high import/export indicators in BRICS and has a developed system of trade with the new BRICS countries. It is safe to assume that the UAE will become a bridge for BRICS integration in the new BRICS.

Comparative Analysis of Trade and Investment in the BRICS Countries

A comparison of the role of direct investment in the BRICS economies with the role of international trade in their economic development reveals that all BRICS countries are characterised by a significantly lower importance of foreign investment in the economy compared to trade.

Diagram 2.

The role of the BRICS (5 countries) and BRICS (10 countries) states in the global economy (GDP, trade, FDI, % of global values)



Source: Data from the World Bank website (<https://databank.worldbank.org/BRICS-COUNTRIES2/id/2577ded4>)

In general, the role of the BRICS members in the global economy can be described by three key indicators, following an approximate "3-2-1" ratio. The share of the BRICS (5 countries) in world GDP (based on PPP) was just over 30%, while for the BRICS (10 countries) it was about one third of world GDP. The share of BRICS-5 in world trade (including exports and imports) was slightly below 20%, while for BRICS-10 it was slightly above 20% (around 23%). As for the BRICS countries' total share in global foreign direct investment, it was at a much lower level: less than 10% for BRICS (5) and just over 10% for BRICS (10). Moreover, the latter share has shown a declining trend over the last two years for the leading BRICS economies.

However, this 10% of global investment was not evenly distributed among the BRICS countries. The main destination of foreign investment and the leading investor among the

BRICS countries, by a wide margin from the other members, was China. Over the past decade, the People's Republic of China has accounted for 88% of total investment in the BRICS (5 countries). Without China, the BRICS would not have been able to account for even the relatively modest 10% of global investment in the world economy shown in Diagram 2. This reveals a significant dichotomy in the development of trade and investment within the BRICS, especially if China's investments are excluded.

The same pattern was observed for FDI flows between BRICS countries (Table 2).

Table 2.

**Accumulated mutual foreign direct investment
within BRICS (5 countries)**

Country/Year	2010	2015	2020
Brazil	791	2,299	1,935
China	14,512	64,430	151,439
India	622	1,218	1,795
Russian Federation	4,187	3,440	4,819
South Africa	7,281	3,978	6,999
Total	27,393	75,365	166,987

Source: Compiled by the authors using data from the UNCTAD report (https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/diae2023d1_en.pdf)

The undisputed leader in terms of cumulative investment among the BRICS (5 countries) over the years of BRICS existence is China, with a relatively high level of \$151.5 billion, compared to the much smaller \$2-7 billion for the other BRICS (5 countries) (Table 2). However, the bulk of Chinese investment is not concentrated within the BRICS countries, but in Asia, including Singapore, South Korea and Japan, and in the Caribbean, including the Cayman Islands and the Virgin Islands¹¹.

South Africa ranked second after China in terms of attractiveness to BRICS investors (5 countries). The volume of its accumulated modern investments amounted to about USD 7 billion (Table 2). However, this figure is even lower than in 2010, when South Africa joined BRICS and became the fifth member

of the group. Thus, for more than a decade, BRICS membership has not led to a noticeable increase in investment by the participating countries in the South African economy.

If we exclude statistics on China from the total accumulated investment for the BRICS countries, the scale of the challenge of attracting foreign investment to the BRICS region becomes clear.

This highlights the urgent need to address the issue of attracting foreign investment to the region. Over the past 10 years, excluding investment in China, the total growth of investment in other BRICS countries was only \$2.667 billion (a 1.2-fold increase). The average annual increase in investment excluding China over this period was remarkably low at 0.21%.

The limited use of foreign investment to stimulate national economic growth in various BRICS countries can be interpreted in different ways. A common perspective on this issue often attributes it to a lack of confidence among international investors in the reliability and stability of recipient economies, a view that is difficult to dispute.

However, another logic can be proposed. On the one hand, in the context of growing instability in interstate relations and the fragmentation of the world economy, the fact that the BRICS countries, with relatively low participation in international trade and very modest attraction of foreign investment, are able to reproduce more than a third of the world GDP indicates a high degree of autonomy of production processes in the countries of the association. It should be noted that friendship sharing is also becoming popular in developed Western economies, which are trying to wean themselves off dependence on hydrocarbons or semiconductors from what they see as unfriendly and unreliable economies.

On the other hand, the absence of significant amounts of foreign investment in the national economy indicates an untapped potential for innovation and industrial development that could contribute to much higher rates of economic growth and could be more effectively harnessed by the collective efforts of the countries of such a significant international association.

Sluggish Performance of Current BRICS Investment Flows

Investment flows, both in absolute terms and relative to the countries' GDP, have remained stable for most of the period under review, irrespective of changes in trade dynamics.

China's current investment flows to the BRICS economies are very small. China invests equally in all BRICS economies, with the exception of the Russian Federation. In 2015, investment growth in this direction stalled and after 2021, China's investment in Russia becomes significantly lower than in other BRICS economies.

Table 3.

Direct mutual current investments within BRICS (10 countries) in 2022¹² in millions of US dollars

- First most important investor
- Second most important investor

Investors	Recipients									
	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa	UAE	Iran	Ethiopia	Egypt	Saudi Arabia
Brazil		0	-3	24	-3	-379	0	0	0	0
Russia	-6		16	-8	-3	0	0	0	0	0
India	295	2		-13	-56	3080	-3	-4	-48	-18
China	-40	1,135	-166		-538	2,040	-26	-191	-70	-516
South Africa	212	0	47	-1		-145	213	0	0	0
UAE	674	926	1,119	477	858		0	0	0	0
Iran	0	0	0	-1	0	0		0	0	0
Ethiopia	0	0	0	12	0	0	0		0	0
Egypt	0	0	0	2	-3	0	0	0		0
Saudi Arabia	-2	63	-60	-403	-106	0	0	0	0	

Sources: Compiled by the authors based on the IMF data (<https://data.imf.org/regular.aspx?key=61227426>)

In the first decade after 2010, FDI (foreign direct investment) between BRICS countries grew at a high rate. However, this is mainly due to the growth of Chinese investment in the BRICS economies, much of it in the Russian Federation (although the trend has now been reversed by a sharp decline in investment). This initial growth can be explained more by the rapid development of the Chinese economy as a whole than by the performance of the BRICS. This is particularly evident in the statistics for South Africa, where membership of the organisation did not lead to an increase in investment between the four original members and one new entrant.

The United Arab Emirates has emerged as the most active new participant in the investment policies of the enlarged BRICS+. It is currently the most attractive investment destination among the BRICS countries, surpassing even China in terms of investment inflows. However, other new BRICS countries can also contribute to the group's investment potential.

It can be observed that the countries most involved in trade with other BRICS members (Table 1) also tend to have the most active investment activities within the group (Tables 2 and 3). For example, China, which is the leader in intra-BRICS investment, is also heavily involved in intra-BRICS trade. However, the volume of intra-group investment remains significantly lower than trade flows.

The same trend can be observed for the new BRICS countries. The UAE is active in both international trade and investment flows, surpassing many of the five BRICS members. Therefore, it is realistic to expect that the UAE's membership in BRICS will deepen its cooperation with other member states in both trade and investment.

Possible BRICS Actions to Reverse the Dichotomy

Mutual investment is a crucial element of economic cooperation in most regional or international associations and groupings around the world, and it should be a priority for BRICS.

Another obstacle to increased investment flows to BRICS is the relatively low credit ratings of the member countries. Standard & Poor's¹³ and Fitch¹⁴ have given India, South Africa, Brazil and China ratings of BBB-, BB-, BB and A+ respectively. These ratings have a significant impact on investor behaviour. It is widely believed that investing in financial instruments of countries rated below BBB- is considered highly risky. With two of the five BRICS countries rated below investment grade, foreign investment in these countries is severely restricted.

Currently, the BRICS countries are facing a significant decline in both foreign and domestic investment amid escalating tensions with Western countries, unprecedented sanctions, protectionist measures, growing mistrust and a fragmented global economy. We believe that understanding the scale of this problem and its underlying causes will be the first step towards possible initiatives by Russia and its partners to strengthen the mechanism of economic cooperation within the BRICS framework, with the aim of restoring the level of foreign investment to higher volumes.

Let's highlight a few factors that could contribute to increased trade and investment flows among the BRICS countries:

1) *Active engagement of new BRICS countries in trade and economic relations within the group, especially after the expansion with new African members:* BRICS and Africa have a long history of cooperation, with African countries actively engaging with the group in various formats. Over the years, economic relations between Africa and BRICS have shown significant growth, reaching nearly \$500 billion in trade by 2023, positioning BRICS as the continent's largest trading partner.

2) *Renewed commitment to trade and investment liberalisation measures in BRICS and BRICS countries' policies, including with regard to e-commerce and digital goods and services.* E-commerce is very dynamic, both globally and within the BRICS, and can be an additional factor in increasing trade flows.

3) *Development of BRICS special economic zones (SEZs) and promotion of cooperation among them.* All BRICS countries pay special attention

to these zones. As SEZs provide favourable conditions for investors, they can logically become an important additional factor in increasing investment and trade flows among BRICS countries.

4) *Establishment of a system of regular preparation of a set of indicators of trade and investment interaction between the BRICS countries* to ensure continuous monitoring of the state of trade between the BRICS countries and adjustment of their policies in case of identification of problems in certain areas of interaction between the countries.

5) *Increased investment from the New BRICS Development Bank.* The New BRICS Development Bank could play a more important role in ensuring a steady flow of investment. However, its funding remains relatively modest. A total of \$32.8 billion¹⁵ in loans has been disbursed since the bank's inception. Compare this with the hundreds of billions of dollars in support packages from leading global or even regional banks and the inadequacy of the support becomes clear.

6) *Investment guarantees.* Geopolitical risks, global economic fragmentation and increasing instability have undermined the effectiveness of national investment guarantees in many BRICS countries. If national guarantees prove insufficient to attract the necessary investment, it would be logical to consider establishing an effective system of collective investment guarantees among the group's states. The New Development Bank or its specialised unit could play this role with relatively modest financial resources. Investment guarantees require fewer resources than direct financial support for national projects. The World Bank Group's experience with the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) demonstrates the potential to attract significant investment to unstable economies in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

¹ Andrey A. Voropay took part in the preparation of source materials for this article. Support from the Faculty of the World economy group of students for the BRICS studies is appreciated.

² Data from the World Bank website (<https://databank.worldbank.org/BRICS-COUNTRIES2/id/2577ded4>).

³ Data from TradeMap (<https://www.trademap.org/Index.aspx>).

⁴ Data from the UN Comtrade Database (<https://comtradeplus.un.org/TradeFlow?Frequency=A&Flows=all&CommodityCodes=TOTAL&Partners=643&Reporters=76&period=2022&AggregateBy=none&BreakdownMode=plus>).

⁵ Data from Trade Map (https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm).

⁶ Data from the UN Comtrade Database (<https://comtradeplus.un.org/TradeFlow?Frequency=A&Flows=all&CommodityCodes=TOTAL&Partners=643&Reporters=76&period=2022&AggregateBy=none&BreakdownMode=plus>).

⁷ Mirrored data from Trade Map (<https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral>).

⁸ Data from the UN Comtrade Database (<https://comtradeplus.un.org/TradeFlow?Frequency=A&Flows=all&CommodityCodes=TOTAL&Partners=643&Reporters=76&period=2022&AggregateBy=none&BreakdownMode=plus>).

⁹ These statistics are taken from Trade Map (https://www.trademap.org/Bilateral_TS.aspx?nvpm).

¹⁰ Data for Brazil, China, South Africa, and the UAE (2023); for Russia, India, Iran, Egypt, and Ethiopia (2022); no data has been provided for Saudi Arabia at the time of publication.

¹¹ Data from the website of the National Bureau of Statistics of China (<https://data.stats.gov.cn/english/easyquery.htm?cn=C01>).

¹² The data pertains to Russia for the year 2021 and for the other countries for the year 2022. There is no data for Saudi Arabia in the database.

¹³ <https://www.spglobal.com/marketintelligence/en/mi/products/country-risk-analyst.html>

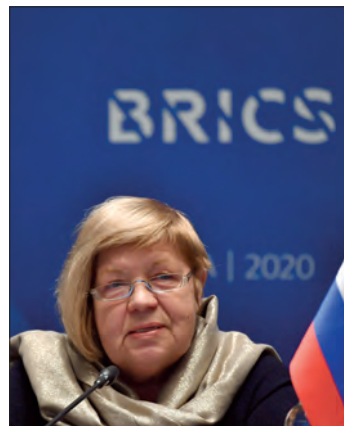
¹⁴ <https://www.fitchratings.com/>

¹⁵ The official source is the website of the New Development Bank (<https://www.ndb.int/>).



Lyudmila SEKACHEVA

President of the Regional Public
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BRICS People Choosing Life



The 'BRICS People Choosing Life' Programme is a Multinational Code of Moral Development and Interaction

A country's moral values are its most powerful unifying force.

Dmitry Likhachev, academician

In the year of Russia's BRICS presidency in 2024, comes the next phase of the multilateral socio-cultural Programme *BRICS People Choosing Life*, which has been implemented in the member countries of the association since 2022 by the public organisation *BRICS. World of Traditions* in partnership with Patrice Lumumba People's Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), under the motto *From Ecology of the Soul and Body to Ecology of the World*.

The Programme focuses on the formation of the so-called *ecology of the soul*, the development of a person's spiritual and moral character through education, enlightenment, and upbringing based on values such as love, friendship, trust, kindness, and respect for people, the homeland, and other cultures. This should contribute to the further rapprochement of BRICS nations and enhance the

international standing of each individual country and the association as a whole.

The first stage of the Programme took place in India from 12 to 21 December, and was dedicated to the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Russia and India. It was held in New Delhi, Mumbai, and Pune. The Programme included 12 events on humanitarian and business topics, attended by more than 2000 students and business people.



The programme began with a traditional Indian lamp-lighting ceremony at the India International Centre in New Delhi. In his video message, P.R. Knyazev, Ambassador-at-Large of the Russian Foreign Ministry and Sous-Sherpa for BRICS, noted: *The Indian phase of the BRICS People Choosing Life Programme covers various areas of humanitarian cooperation, including education, culture and arts. I believe that civil society initiatives like this are crucial in strengthening the strategic partnership between the five countries and raising public interest and awareness about innovative multilateral cooperation within the BRICS framework.*

According to the organisers, the Programme of Life, which is primarily intended to bring people together, preaches such moral concepts as kindness, love, trust and harmony between people, as the famous academician Dmitry Likhachev wrote: *'A country's moral values are its most powerful unifying force.'*

As part of the Programme, a Russian-Indian Cultural and Educational Centre of Leo Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi was established on the basis of the Delhi Public School (Dwarka, India) in partnership with the Moscow State Budgetary Educational Institution *School No. 1409* and the Regional Public Organisation *BRICS. World of Traditions*. Its activities are aimed at moral education of children on the basis of the humanistic heritage left to the world by these two great thinkers.



Dr. (Ms.) Kiran Datar, the chairman of Delhi Public School, emphasized that, in today's world of aggression and violence, it is essential to instil in children the idea of unity among people, unity on the planet, and unity of the human race. Ms. Sunita Tanwar, the principal of the School, stressed that the main objective of the Programme was to preserve and promote the moral heritage and philosophy of non-violence advocated by two champions: Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy.

The Russian House in Mumbai hosted an exhibition of drawings by students from School No. 1409 in Moscow as part of the *Children to Children* charity event. After the event, the drawings were donated to the *Indian Room* Charitable Foundation for the Protection of Slum Children.

As part of the educational track of the Programme, a relay of project presentations of the international cultural and research project *BRICS Great Teachers* took place at seven venues in Mumbai and Pune from 15 to 20 December 2022. The project was successfully implemented in 2016–2019 in universities, schools and colleges of Russia, India, China, Brazil and South Africa to preserve the cultural heritage left to the world by the Great Teachers:

Confucius (China), Leo Tolstoy (Russia), Mahatma Gandhi (India), Nelson Mandela (South Africa), Baron de Rio Branco (Brazil).

At the end of the Indian leg of the Programme, the students and members of the delegation joyfully released multicoloured balloons with the tricolour of the Russian and Indian flags into the sky to celebrate the friendship between the two great nations. According to the students of Mumbai University, *BRICS People Choosing Life* is an honest and kind programme that has become a breath of fresh air for Indian youth, a stream of clean water that cleanses and washes the consciousness, souls and minds of people polluted by all kinds of falsifications!

The results of the Indian phase of the Programme were presented at the Second BRICS Project Lab on 13 April at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) of the Russian Foreign Ministry. Sergey Ryabkov, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation and Russia's BRICS Sherpa, who was present at the meeting, assessed the significance of the Indian programme as follows: *'The ideology brought to the world by Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy, and programmes such as BRICS People Choosing Life and the creation of the Tolstoy and Gandhi Centre, are needed now more than ever. It is a living creation, covering all areas of cooperation, from trade and economics to science, education and the values element'*.

The second phase of the BRICS People Choosing Life Programme will take place in Moscow, the Moscow, Tver, Samara and Tver regions, and the Altai Territory in the year of Russia's BRICS presidency in 2024. It is dedicated to the 195th anniversary of the birth of Leo Tolstoy, the 75th anniversary of the memory of Mahatma Gandhi, the 150th anniversary of the birth of Nicholas Roerich and the 100th anniversary of the Central Asian expedition of Nicholas, Yuri and Helena Roerich, and the 550th anniversary of the memory of the Tver merchant Afanasy Nikitin and his journey to India.

During the Russian phase, 12 cultural, educational and business projects will be implemented. They are expected to reach more than 8,000 people.



The *BRICS Great Teachers* cultural and educational project continues with the exhibition of the same name. This year, the *Gallery of Great Teachers* was enriched with the names of the artist and thinker Nikolas Roerich and the Indian poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore, and with new countries joining the BRICS, we expect further enrichment of the cultural base of our project.

We plan to present the *Leo Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi Centre* and open its branches in a number of regional schools in Russia.

As part of the project *Open your Heart to Kindness*, an international creative competition for children and young people of Russia, India, Brazil and South Africa will be held in schools and colleges in Russia, India, Brazil and South Africa for drawings, essays, handicrafts, presentations and projects on the theme '*About good, in a good way, for good*' (a quote by Nicholas Roerich). The works of the contestants will be donated to orphanages for orphaned and disabled children to provide moral support for children who need love and kindness.

As part of the *BRICS Peoples for Cybersecurity* research and information project, a roundtable discussion on the topic of '*Digital Society: Trends, Possibilities and Risks*' will be held at several leading universities across five regions in Russia.

The business track of the Programme includes the *BRICS Trade House AURA* project, which aims to develop trade and economic relations between Russia and the BRICS countries through business missions and trade fairs in Russian regions.

A project to create an anthem for the BRICS countries will be implemented in the form of a multilateral youth music and poetry contest with the participation of creative young people from Russia, India, Brazil, South Africa, China, Iran, Egypt and Ethiopia. The anthem will be created as a creative message to the world, taking into account the singing traditions of the BRICS peoples and reflecting their aspirations for unity.

In the year of the BRICS Presidency of Brazil, in January 2025, the flag of the Programme will move from Russia to Brazil, where the third stage will take place to celebrate the 180th anniversary of the birth of Baron de Rio Branco, the '*Father of Brazilian Diplomacy*,' and the 200th anniversary of the first scientific expedition to Brazil organised by Grigory Langsdorf (1822–1829), an explorer, naturalist, and consul for the Russian Empire in Rio de Janeiro.

In his video address to the students at the official launch of the Russian leg of the Programme, Sergey Ryabkov, Deputy Foreign Minister and Russia's BRICS Sherpa, emphasised that today, especially in view of the forthcoming BRICS expansion, Russia is facing major challenges, in the implementation of which youth diplomacy plays and will certainly play an important role.

This wise advice from a senior diplomat gives the youth of the BRICS countries the strength and confidence to implement multilateral projects and initiatives for the successful development and trust-based cooperation of the BRICS countries. As the great Indian philosopher Mahatma Gandhi said, '*If we want to achieve true world peace, we must start with the children.*'



The Regional Public Organisation BRICS. World of Traditions has existed since 2016. The first person who supported the idea of the organisation and its plans in the Russian Foreign Ministry at that time was Vadim Borisovich Lukov (30 June 1953 – 12 August 2016), a Soviet and Russian diplomat, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Ambassador at Large of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Russia's sous-sherpa in BRICS, coordinator in the Russian Foreign Ministry for the G20.



As a sign of deep respect and gratitude to Vadim Borisovich, all the activities of the Organisation under the 2023 programme have been dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the birth of this remarkable diplomat and man, and the 8th anniversary of his death.

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