

## ARTICLES

### BRICS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY – PRIORITY AREAS OF COOPERATION FOR GAINING A Foothold IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD ORDER

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*The international world order has been changing rapidly since the turn of the twenty-first century. BRICS, as an economic association, that unites five countries, each of which is the leading state in its own region, is faced with a variety of modern-day challenges. The article examines the most important issues for BRICS, as well as the outcomes and potential future directions for deepening cooperation among the BRICS member states and in more extended formats. The main purpose of the article is to identify major trends and factors that influence the formation of the BRICS agenda and the future direction of development. Other important tasks that could be mentioned are determining the reasons for the intensification of political cooperation, obstacles and opportunities for BRICS institutionalization as an international organization and potential expansion. To become a stable international institution, BRICS needs to devise an effective strategy of development that includes key areas such as the economy, investment cooperation, digitalization, security, ecology, and the environment. The creation and strengthening of external relations of BRICS with leading developing countries and international organizations, as well as cooperation on the basis of equality, complementarity, and mutual benefit in the economic, scientific, and technical fields, taking into account the significant resource base of BRICS countries, the largest labor resources, capacious domestic markets, goals of economic modernization and high technologies, as well as food and energy safety will provide BRICS with the opportunity to form an effective development strategy to gain a foothold in the multipolar world order.*

**Keywords:** BRICS; development; strategy; multipolar; world order; economy; policy; expansion; institutionalization; digitalization; security; health; environment.

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## Introduction

The international world order is rapidly changing at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Various modern tendencies affect the entire system of international relations, resulting in the multipolar world. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that when a global crisis occurs, liberal economic attitudes are not always consistent. Even if the economy suffers, states prefer to close borders and protect their citizens. As a result, we may assume that the phenomenon of globalization, which became so popular at the end of the twentieth century, will be replaced by the processes of regionalization.<sup>1</sup> As a result, entities such as the European Union (EU), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS may play an important role in forming a post-coronavirus world order.

BRICS is an example of the so-called transcontinental dimension, in which the interaction between four continents – Asia, Africa, Europe and South America – in two hemispheres is demonstrated. It is the economic association that unites

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<sup>1</sup> Доклад «Евразийская экономическая интеграция – 2020» (25 августа 2020 г.) / Евразийский банк развития [Eurasian Development Bank, Eurasian Economic Integration – 2020, Report, 25 August 2020] (Sep. 21, 2021), available at <https://eabr.org/analytics/integration-research/cii-reports/doklad-evraziyskaya-ekonomicheskaya-integratsiya-2020/>.

five countries, each of which is the leading state in its region.<sup>2</sup> The main value of this arrangement lies in the formation of a modern multipolar world, as the BRICS countries unite to respond to modern-day challenges.

The acronym BRICS is formed by the first letters of the English-language names of the five countries mentioned: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Their territory covers 29.6 percent of the world's land surface, and they account for 42.6 percent of the world's population.<sup>3</sup> Although the term "BRICS" was coined by chance, it has important implications. During a visit to India in 1998, the Prime Minister of Russia, E. Primakov, stated that there are many problems in the world that are dependent on relations between India, China and Russia. He actively promoted the formation of a "Russia-India-China" allied coalition (RIC). In fact, this was the prototype for the idea of creating a group of BRICS countries. In 2001, Jim O'Neill first coined the term "BRIC," predicting that by 2050, Brazil, Russia, India and China will be among the world's six largest economies (along with the United States and Japan). As a result, the emergence of the concept of "BRICS" on the one hand means the rapid development of five countries in terms of economic indicators; on the other hand, the changing international community, with its various opportunities and challenges, contributes to their unification.

Later, new reports and studies from various companies and organizations appeared, adding to the popularity of BRIC. Initially, the BRIC concept became popular in the business and investment world as a result of the "hype" organized by investment bankers and participants in international financial markets. However, with the strengthening of economic and trade ties and the gradual formation of the identity of the association, the base of cooperation of the BRIC countries has expanded significantly, including non-institutionalized formats of cooperation on political issues. On Russia's initiative, the first meeting of foreign ministers in the BRIC format was held in September 2006, within the framework of the United Nations (U.N.) General Assembly, and in June 2009, the first summit of the BRIC leaders was held in Yekaterinburg.

Despite the fact that the BRIC association, which became BRICS in November 2010 at the G20 summit in Seoul, when South Africa formally applied to join the BRIC cooperation mechanism, was initially created primarily on an economic basis, political issues have been increasingly included on the agenda of the annual BRICS summits since the second declaration. The creation of the association was partly influenced by the global financial and economic crisis of 2008–2009. However, in today's rapidly changing world, it would be quite difficult to limit oneself solely to economics. Such an important component of the BRICS activities, as ensuring the economic security of

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<sup>2</sup> A review of the economies of the BRICS countries provides more accurate and expanded characteristics. See Роль БРИКС в мировой экономике // TV BRICS. 6 мая 2019 г. [The Role of BRICS in the Global Economy, TV BRICS, 6 May 2019] (Sep. 21, 2021), available at <https://tvbrics.com/news/rol-briks-v-mirovoy-ekonomike/>.

<sup>3</sup> 国家统计局发布时间, 第一章 金砖国家概况及经济社会指标比较 (2017) [National Bureau of Statistics of China, BRICS Joint Statistical Publication (2017)] (Nov. 8, 2020), available at [http://www.stats.gov.cn/ztc/zts/jzgjhtjsc/jz2017/201709/t20170901\\_1530127.html](http://www.stats.gov.cn/ztc/zts/jzgjhtjsc/jz2017/201709/t20170901_1530127.html).

the participating countries, was also closely related to the political dimension, which was subsequently expressed in the creation of certain institutions.

### **1. Political Dimension of BRICS Cooperation**

The dominant circumstance in the characteristics of BRICS is the format of cooperation to achieve the economic goals and objectives of partners, which is why the documents of BRICS summits concentratedly consolidate this direction in the content of cooperation, which requires legal support. At the same time, economic ties, covering a wide variety of areas, are constantly expanding the boundaries of cooperation, which is sometimes focused on achieving very ambitious goals. One of the common tasks for the BRICS countries, in particular, is forecasting and implementing changes in the functioning of the global economic system, a key component of which is the reform of the structure and management of the Bretton Woods system of financial institutions.

As previously stated, the main efforts of the BRICS countries are related to economic cooperation and development, but member-states are attempting to broaden the scope of cooperation. Today, their most important achievement is the strengthening of interaction and mutual understanding, which allows this group of countries to defend and advance their interests in the face of a fierce battle in the international arena. The socio-economic and political models of BRICS are not just centers of power or economic influence, but distinct historical projects, the strength of which is not measured by comparison in real time, but by the ability to respond to the challenges of time in the long term.

Based on the specifics of building multilateral ties within the alliance, the manifestation of the political will of the leaders of the BRICS countries is necessary to ensure effective cooperation in a number of strategic areas, such as the fuel and energy complex and the defense industry. This would enable the countries of the RIC triangle, on the one hand, and Brazil and the Republic of South Africa, on the other, to overcome the objective logistical difficulties that inevitably arise in trade relations.

In addition, the formation and development of BRICS is taking place in the context of an acute ideological struggle with Western projects of a similar nature. As a result, the question of the appeal of BRICS as an association to other countries, as well as the creation of a positive image of BRICS for the rest of the international community, is becoming extremely important. This task is implemented in various ways, ranging from the work of the media to shape public opinion to meetings in the “outreach” format. This format, in which Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa invite states from their respective regions to work cooperatively, presupposes the consolidation of efforts to attract representatives of target countries in the context of the political process.

Of course, the inclusion of political issues on the agenda of the group is a gradual process, and the commitment of BRICS countries to the principles of international law and the fight against terrorism is expressed already in the first documents of the association. However, chronologically, it is possible to distinguish 2013–2014

as a specific turning point: it was during this period that both the corresponding rhetoric and the activities of BRICS in the political direction were activated. In 2013, as the Syrian crisis worsened, discussions of security issues and military-political cooperation within the BRICS framework were not ruled out. The Ukrainian crisis also became one of the topics for discussion at various meetings of officials of the BRICS countries. As a result, foreign policy events had a significant impact on the inclusion of the political component in the discourse of BRICS interactions.

The constant and continuous increase in the number of aspects related to the political “track” of BRICS makes it possible to single out a number of main lines of interaction that have emerged. Cooperation in these areas was actively pursued, and there is a strong likelihood that it will continue to expand in the future.

Resolving acute local political crises (while not necessarily directly affecting the interests of the BRICS member states) is one of the top priorities mentioned in both, the annual declarations following summit meetings and the working documents of individual platforms, within the framework of which certain issues of cooperation are discussed.

Information security, in particular, the fight against cybercrime, is being discussed more and more actively within BRICS recently, thanks to the efforts of Russia, India and the People’s Republic of China. Information security issues have taken a prominent place on the agenda of the 2016 summit in India: the Goa Declaration speaks of the need to counter terrorist use of the Internet for their own purposes.<sup>4</sup> The countries have also agreed to exchange experiences and achievements in the field of information and communication technology, with the meeting at the level of the relevant ministries serving as the vehicle for this exchange.

Other challenges to this order include terrorism and drug trafficking. In 2016, Russia called for the creation of a working group within the BRICS framework to discuss counter-terrorism issues. In 2015, the BRICS Working Group was established to coordinate efforts to prevent drug trafficking. It is not surprising that the fight against terrorism has become one of the leitmotifs of the Goa Declaration: in particular, while it is linked to other challenges (drug trafficking, cybercrime). Among new, but more and increasingly actively articulated problems is the need to prevent an arms race in outer space. The ambitions of the majority of countries participating in the space exploration group are already backed up by real actions, which necessitates the development of clear “rules of the game.” The solution to these problems is also on the political plane.

It is also worth noting the heterogeneity of the formats in which the BRICS members develop a joint position on political cooperation. On the one hand, summit meetings of heads of state have become annual since 2009, in modern conditions accompanied by the adoption of program documents (Declarations, Action Plans). On the other hand, separate structures are created for discussions on various specific

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<sup>4</sup> BRICS Goa Declaration, Goa, India, 16 October 2016 (Sep. 21, 2021), available at <http://brics.utoronto.ca/docs/161016-go.html>.

issues: working groups and even separate forums (Parliamentary, Civil, Youth). It is worth noting that some of the BRICS formats initially created ad hoc, eventually became the standard. For instance, the meetings of the national security advisers of the BRICS states, the first of which was held in Russia in a quadripartite format in 2009, eventually became an annual event.

As can be seen, the formats of BRICS cooperation have expanded significantly and intensively in recent years. The political positions of the BRICS countries are being consolidated on the sidelines of the G20 summits, as well as within U.N. institutions. The proposed format of the dialogue between BRICS and the G7 could become an opportunity for an exchange of views on global politics, but this is hindered by internal differences that exist in both groups on political issues.

Indeed, in terms of the importance of the problems of political cooperation for individual BRICS members, a certain gap can be observed. Russia is known for its focus on political issues which is most characteristic of Russia. To a lesser extent, this phenomenon is characteristic of China; only a few initiatives in the political sphere have emerged from Brazil and South Africa. India appears to be the most detached from political upheavals: experts from this country have repeatedly emphasized the economic nature of the association. However, this did not prevent the inclusion of a number of political decisions in the final document of the 2016 summit.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, apart from other problems, two aspects are currently gaining special significance for BRICS: the debate over the need for institutionalization; and a debate over the prospects for expansion. These two points appear to require further consideration.

## 2. Institutionalization of BRICS

The problem of BRICS institutionalization remains quite relevant in the light of recent events. The lack of a founding agreement, statutory document and formalized structure in BRICS does not allow either political scientists or officials to fully speak of BRICS as an organization. At the same time, the perspective of the evolution of the BRICS association into an international organization is assessed by Russian and foreign publicists in a rather contradictory way, ranging from skepticism of some Western authors<sup>6</sup> to optimistic statements that the process of institutionalization has already been launched thanks to the New Development Bank.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> BRICS Goa Action Plan, Goa, India, 16 October 2016 (Sep. 21, 2021), available at <http://brics.utoronto.ca/docs/161016-go-a-action-plan.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Jyrki Kähkönen, *BRICS as a New Constellation in International Relations?*, IAMCR 2013 Conference, Dublin, 25–29 June 2013 (Sep. 21, 2021), available at <https://research.tuni.fi/uploads/2020/03/50196994-brics-as-a-new-constellation-in-international-relations51.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Ravni Thakur, *Institutionalizing BRICS: The New Development Bank and its Implications*, Delhi Policy Group (August 2014) (Sep. 21, 2021), available at [https://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/1070\\_Institutionalising\\_BRICS\\_The\\_New\\_Development\\_Bank\\_and\\_its\\_Implications.pdf](https://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/1070_Institutionalising_BRICS_The_New_Development_Bank_and_its_Implications.pdf).

Of course, BRICS could not exist as an international forum without some level of formalization. Over the years of cooperation, a procedure has been developed for holding annual summits, at which decisions that are vital for the further development of BRICS and are reflected in the final documents are adopted. In addition, the presence in each BRICS country of the posts of Sherpas and Sous-Sherpas responsible for this area of foreign policy can also be considered as one of the signs of the institutionalization of the BRICS. Regular meetings at the level of the heads of ministries and departments of the BRICS countries should also be taken into account, as this will aid in the implementation of institutionalization. In this regard, the establishment of economic institutions in 2014, particularly the New Development Bank and the Pool of Conditional Foreign Exchange Reserves cannot be ignored. This step is critical for the institutionalization of the association, regardless of whether it is deepened in the future.

However, this level of institutionalization clearly does not cover all the “tracks” of cooperation within the association. The need for joint development and protection in the international arena of common interests, including political ones, could become one of the prerequisites for continuing the launched process. The emergence of organizationally formalized institutions under the auspices of BRICS could enable the five member countries to more effectively consolidate their efforts of, including in the political sphere. Institutionalization would allow the group to be formalized through a synthesis of bilateral and multilateral ties, namely the RIC triangle, on the one hand, and representatives of the South, previously, included in the trilateral format of the IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa), on the other. Moreover, the legal consolidation of BRICS as an organization would help to legitimize the decisions taken at the summits, making these norms peremptory from the standpoint of international law. One of these solutions appears to be the codification of the principles of BRICS functioning, which have already been reflected more than once in the joint statements of the leaders of the countries, on the basis of the principle of expediency. On the other hand, such a situation would inevitably lead to excessive bureaucracy, as seen in the examples of both universal international organizations (such as the U.N.) and associations of an integration type (in particular, the European Union). It is clear that the necessary consensus on the issue of institutionalization has yet to be reached either in academia or among those who make foreign policy decisions. In any case, the issue remains open for further discussion in expert and government circles.

Concerning the legal dimension, it should be noted that despite the growing denials of international law, as well as its principles, the widespread approach of domestic legal science regarding the legal principles of mutual cooperation of the BRICS countries is to place them within the framework of the principles of international law. At the same time, it is necessary to single out the political and legal significance, role and place of BRICS cooperation principles in the system of international law, as well as their relationship with the basic principles of the U.N. Charter.

A separate issue, one which to a large extent determines the adequacy of the results in solving many problems and formulating a number of key qualifications, is the question of the legal nature of the unification of the five countries. Using various formulas such as “group,” “alliance,” “partnership,” “association” and so on is perceived primarily as evidence of their lack of formal legal and organizational characteristics in comparison to the ‘traditional’ international organizations in the current international legal order. In theoretical terms, the situation is complicated by the fact that it is directly related to the issue of the possibilities of independent action of the association of states in international relations: the determination of international legal consequences is essential not only for the participants of such associations themselves, but also for their so-called external contour, as well as for the interstate system as a whole. Indeed, at this current stage, BRICS lacks clear legal outlines and statements about prospects of a different nature are very cautious. On this matter, one author has commented,

Since BRICS as an association does not have a clearly expressed legal foundation, its transformation as it develops into a full-fledged powerful international political institution is too early to predict.<sup>8</sup>

However, as work in this direction continues, taking into account other successful steps within BRICS, we can expect perceptible changes in this sphere in the near future.

### 3. BRICS Expansion

The political component can also be attributed to the dilemma of further expansion of BRICS at the expense of external players. This problem is interconnected with the issue of institutionalization raised above: an increase in the number of BRICS members could lead to a change in the status of the association. The only BRIC expansion in history took place in 2010 when South Africa joined the group.

The universal nature of the principles underlying BRICS activities is appealing to other participants in the international process. The expansion of BRICS could become not only another informational reason for attention to the group, but also an opportunity to increase the true weight of the association in the global arena. At the same time, potential newcomers should not only meet certain economic criteria, but also share the political values enshrined, in particular, in the Fortaleza Declaration.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sideek Seyad, *A Critical Overview of the Objectives and Future Direction of the BRICS and its New Development Bank*, 31(9) J. Int'l Bank. L. & Regul. 495 (2016).

<sup>9</sup> Jaya Josie et al., *BRICS Evolution Vision: Institutionalization, Enlargement and Outreach Technologies in VII BRICS Academic Forum* 404 (Georgy Toloraya ed., 2015).



When discussing the grounds for possible expansion, it should be noted that BRICS has a successful outreach format, which was launched at the 2013 summit in Durban, South Africa. In fact, within this dimension, the host country invites partners in the region (often entire organizations) to cooperate. At the same time, it is not surprising that in 2013 attention was focused on the African Union, in 2014 on integration in Latin America (UNASUR), in 2015 there was contact with the SCO and the EAEU, and in 2016 on the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). However, the presence of such a regional component raises the question of how to determine the order of priority of joining BRICS if it is impossible to carry out the expansion of BRICS in all affected regions. Naturally, this issue is still speculative, but potential disagreements among the BRICS members on this issue should be considered and, if possible, neutralized during the negotiation process.

In terms of the circle of potential members, there are abbreviations in the literature that unite possible newcomers (or competitors, depending on the emphasis placed): for example, MINT (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria, Turkey). One of the leading Russian experts on BRICS issues, Professor G. Toloraya, believes that the expansion of the BRICS membership at the expense of representatives from the Islamic world, such as Indonesia, could be expedient in the future.<sup>10</sup> As a result, a civilizational approach can become the basis for a possible expansion. Despite the indicated advantages of the possible expansion of BRICS, at the moment this issue remains only on the plane of expert discussions.

To summarize, as noted by Chinese observer Peng Lu, it is the peculiarities of political identity characteristic of the populations of all five countries that have led to a closer rapprochement between the BRICS states both at the highest level and at the level of contacts between people.<sup>11</sup> This proves once again the assertion that BRICS is much more than a purely economic project. For several years of the format's existence, the first steps towards the path of institutionalization have already been taken: the frequency and sequence of summits have been determined, following which policy documents are adopted; and the first institutions under the auspices of BRICS have begun to operate. There was also the first expansion of the group at the expense of South Africa, although there is now a moratorium on the entry of new members, and the prospects of admitting other states in the near future remain questionable.

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<sup>10</sup> Толорая Г. Зачем России БРИКС? // Россия в глобальной политике. 19 февраля 2015 г. [Georgy Toloraya, *Why Does Russia Need BRICS?*, Russia in Global Affairs, 19 February 2015], 1 Russia in Global Affairs (2015) (Sep. 21, 2021), available at <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Zachem-Rossii-BRIKS-17309>.

<sup>11</sup> Peng Lü, *"It's the Economy, Stupid"? A Comparative Analysis of Confidence in Political Institutions Among the "BRICS" Countries*, paper prepared for the Asia Barometer Workshop (2011) (Sep. 21, 2021), available at [https://ricas.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/aasplatform/achivements/pdf/2011\\_ab\\_lu.pdf](https://ricas.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/aasplatform/achivements/pdf/2011_ab_lu.pdf).

#### **4. Role of the Academic Community**

Currently, the academic society works on all of the abovementioned issues, as well as others. The fact that BRICS is, in many ways, a product of the efforts of the academic community also speaks of the special responsibility of specialists who develop recommendations for the further development of the association.

Moreover, the BRICS expert track appeared before the association itself. Even before the first summit in Yekaterinburg, a consultation mechanism was launched with the participation of academics from Brazil, Russia, India and China. Scientists and practitioners from four BRIC countries met for the first time in person in December 2008, at the Ararat Park Hyatt hotel in Moscow, at the initiative of the “Unity for Russia” and “Russkiy Mir” foundations. Prior to that, they had become increasingly accustomed to seeing each other either in a bilateral format or at Western venues. They began talks about the common interests of the world’s largest “emerging” economies. Doubts were raised about the ability of such different countries, representing different civilizations; to not only unite, but also to find a common language. Subsequently, on the eve of the first BRICS summit, a meeting was held in Yekaterinburg. These meetings marked the beginning of the annual Academic Forum, which the chair country hosts on the eve of the BRICS leaders’ summit, with the expectation of receiving independent assessments and recommendations from scientists. The final documents of the forums on all aspects of multilateral interaction helped in enriching the discussions at the highest level, as well as developing and expanding the BRICS agenda far beyond the originally designated framework of economic cooperation. In a number of areas, experts have been pioneers, drawing attention to emerging issues. The overwhelming majority of the initiatives of the expert community were supported at the highest level and helped in transforming the association into a significant mechanism of global governance with an extensive agenda, capable of formatting the fabric of international relations. By the third summit, the association had grown strong enough that a decision was made at the highest level to institutionalize the expert track by creating a network of research centers in five countries. In Russia, the BRICS National Research Committee (NRC) became the national coordinator in pursuance of the action plan approved by the President of the Russian Federation on 24 May 2011 to implement the agreements reached at the BRICS summit in the Chinese city of Sanya. The committee, as it was established, is designed to contribute to the formation of a single information field in the field of domestic BRICS research. It also promotes the Russian position and expert assessments in the international arena, and the coordination of the activities of leading research organizations and experts in the BRICS region. It consists of a diverse group of experts, who have coined the term “brixologists” to describe themselves. Their primary mission was to organize and conduct research on the role and place of BRICS countries and other “rising” powers in global politics and economics. In 2013, before the summit in South Africa,

in Durban, the heads of the national coordination centers signed the Declaration on the Establishment of the Council of Expert Centers (CEC) BRICS<sup>12</sup> or the BRICS Think Tank Council (in the English version) (BTTC). Its main goal is the exchange of ideas between leading experts, representatives of the scientific community and research centers from five countries, as well as the development of a shared ideology and strategic vision of the prospects for the strengthening of the cooperation between the BRICS countries. Today, the official members of the BRICS CEC are organizations that are called upon to promote five-sided cooperation along the so-called "second track" of BRICS: the Institute for Applied Economic Research in Brazil; the National Committee for BRICS Research in Russia; the Observer Research Foundation in India; the China Council for the BRICS Think Tank Cooperation in China; and the South African BRICS Think Tank in South Africa. Scientists and specialists hold conferences and consultations in both multilateral and bilateral formats on a regular basis. The annual BRICS Academic Forum, to which national coordinators invite representatives of relevant ministries and departments, as well as leading experts from five countries, is at the top of the pyramid. As a rule, the Academic Forum is held under the auspices of the foreign ministry of the host country, and its agenda is formed taking into account the themes of the upcoming BRICS summit.

Meanwhile, the Council of Expert Centers has developed its own system of work. It is based on the "Long-term vision of BRICS." They are referred to as the five main "pillars" of interaction:

- Promotion of economic growth and development;
- Peace and security;
- Social equality, sustainable development and improving the quality of life;
- Political and Economic Management;
- Achieve global progress through knowledge sharing and innovation.

Each of the BRICS member states is responsible for research in that direction. Thus, China is responsible for the first direction of research, Russia, for the second, South Africa for the third, India for the fourth, and Brazil for the fifth. Another "invention" of this type of work is the BRICS Civil Forum, which has become one of the supporting events of the "second track." In addition, the members of the Council of Expert Centers have launched a number of new projects. During Russia's presidency in 2020, Russia will continue the course towards strengthening the practical interaction of the five countries. The XII BRICS Academic Forum held in October 2020 in Moscow brought together about 200 international experts in person and online. As a result, concrete recommendations from experts and civil communities to were prepared for the leaders of the five countries and steps towards closer coordination of research on specialized problems were taken, mainly in three pillars: politics and global governance; economic

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<sup>12</sup> Declaration on the Establishment of the BRICS Think Tank Council, Durban, South Africa (2013) (Sep. 21, 2021), available at [http://www.nkibrics.ru/system/asset\\_docs/data/54cf/71f1/6272/690a/8b0c/0000/original/Declaration\\_on\\_...Think\\_Tanks\\_Council.pdf?1422881265](http://www.nkibrics.ru/system/asset_docs/data/54cf/71f1/6272/690a/8b0c/0000/original/Declaration_on_...Think_Tanks_Council.pdf?1422881265).

growth and cooperation, finance and sustainable development; humanitarian cooperation and people-to-people contacts.<sup>13</sup> In recent years, it has also become important to ensure closer interaction between the national coordinators of the “second track” and the Sherpas/Sous-Sherpas of the BRICS countries, namely, the official and expert tracks of BRICS, in order for the leaders of the five countries to make a more productive use of the recommendations of the expert community. A methodology is being developed for ongoing monitoring of BRICS activities and the implementation of the agreements reached at the summits, which will allow for the identification of “problematic” areas of cooperation and the proposal of steps to achieve consensus on the ongoing formation of the BRICS agenda.

An extremely important argument in favor of the emergence of BRICS was that all of the countries of the association are among the developing powers, are the spokesmen for the economic interests of developing countries and are highly likely to become leading economic powers in the future, given their high rates of economic growth, large population, territory, and aggregate strength.

In recognition of certain shared characteristics, which are specifically presented further in the article, the BRICS countries are gradually forming a mechanism of cooperation to achieve common interests and implement joint action plans based on their complementarity and similarity. Moreover, an even greater potential for economic cooperation between the five countries can be unlocked due to their competitive advantages in terms of resource availability and industrial structure. BRICS countries are the largest generators of intercontinental economic growth among middle-income developing countries. They possess the largest population in the world, especially India and China, and have experienced rapid economic growth over the last two to three decades, only recently giving way to a slight decline. Russia is called the “world gas station” because of its oil and natural gas reserves. Russia can also be proud of its advanced basic science and thriving aerospace and military-industrial complexes. India has been dubbed the “world office” for its leadership in the computer industry and software development, despite the fact that Indian manufactured products are relatively uncompetitive. Brazil is perceived to be dominated by its advanced agriculture and clean technologies. Due to its wealth of mineral resources, Brazil is also referred to as the “global resource base.” South Africa has gained recognition as a gateway to Africa and a springboard for the development of the African continent as a whole, owing to its enormous resources and advanced mining technologies. The BRICS countries are closely linked by a common identity and set of interests. On the one hand, the BRICS countries differ from the developed countries represented in the G7; on the other hand, they differ from ordinary developing countries in terms of scale, speed and potential for development, as well as international ambitions. The

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<sup>13</sup> Recommendations of the 12<sup>th</sup> BRICS Academic Forum to the Leaders: BRICS New Vision for a Better World (2020) (Sep. 21, 2021), available at <https://eng.brics-russia2020.ru/images/106/14/1061402.pdf>.

BRICS members, as emerging markets and G20 members, share common interests in optimizing the industrial structure, reforming the governance system of the global economy, elevating their status in the international system and participating in global governance. In a world economic system dominated by Western countries, the BRICS countries are more vulnerable to the consequences of the global financial crisis and pressure from protectionism in world trade. Therefore, they need to speak with one voice and work together to provide a more favorable international environment for their own transformation and development.

By supporting development and multilateralism, the BRICS countries work together for a fairer, more equitable, just, democratic and representative global political and economic order. When developing the agenda for their summits, the BRICS countries should start with international and regional issues of mutual interest, guided by common goals and aspirations. The BRICS agenda aims to maintain equality and solidarity, openness and inclusiveness, build an open global economy, and deepen cooperation with emerging markets and developing countries. The agenda indicates the direction for BRICS countries to work together to achieve mutually beneficial results and common development goals, as well as to constantly expand the practical cooperation of BRICS, which can benefit the entire world. Under the influence of these internal factors, various summit agendas and joint action plans in accordance with the development goals of BRICS countries have been formulated over the years of the association's work.

The formation of the BRICS agenda is based on the general level of development of the countries that make up this alliance, but it is also dependent on the international situation. The cooperation of the BRICS countries must be viewed in the general context of the global development and evolution of the international system. We are in the midst of a tremendous period of growth, transformation, and adaptation. The world today is becoming increasingly multipolar, the economy is global, cultural diversity is increasing, and society is being digitized. The Law of the Jungle, in which the strong prey on the weak and zero-sum games are no longer acceptable, has been replaced by the universal aspiration of all peoples to live in peace, development, and cooperation based on the win-win model. Against this backdrop, many emerging markets and developing countries are rising, playing an increasingly important role in international processes.

The sudden global financial crisis of 2008 brought the global economy to a halt, and it has yet to fully recover. The coronavirus crisis became the new global trial in 2020, the outcome of which we still cannot predict. Faced with an external shock, the five BRICS countries leveraged their strengths and overlapping interests to create a BRICS-led cooperation mechanism covering a wide range of topics and different levels of engagement. Previously, a number of large cooperation projects had been launched. In particular, the New Development Bank and the BRICS Contingent Reserve Pool have become a source of financing for infrastructure and sustainable

development projects in the BRICS countries, contributing to more efficient global economic management and the emergence of an international financial cushion. Over the past decade, according to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the total GDP of the BRICS countries has grown by 179 percent, trade by 94 percent, and the urban population by 28 percent.<sup>14</sup> All of this has greatly contributed to the stabilization of the global economy and its return to a growth trajectory, as well as brought tangible benefits for more than three billion people. However, the Covid-19 pandemic will definitely affect these indexes negatively.

It is obvious that the development of the BRICS agenda has always closely followed the changes in the international political and economic structure. Today's BRICS agenda has been largely focused again on economic issues, with a focus on what actions can be taken to overcome the crisis-driven slow economic growth. Following the 2011 Sanya summit, the scope of topics discussed within BRICS has gradually expanded from economic and political priorities to humanitarian and social issues. The BRICS countries began to hold various additional events, such as city forums, meetings of ministers of health, events aimed at developing cooperation in the fields of culture, sports, science and technology. As a result, the situation in the international political and economic system, as well as social trends, are external factors influencing the BRICS agenda.

## 5. Levels of Interaction

Over the past decade, BRICS has established an effective framework for cooperation. This framework, which is centered on a summit of leaders, covers a wide range of topics in a comprehensive and "layered" manner. The Annual Leaders Summit is an event of the highest level and of key importance for the cooperation mechanism, which sets the political and strategic direction for all cooperation within BRICS. At the second level of interaction, there are high-level meetings: national security advisers, governors of central banks and ministers of foreign affairs, trade, industry, labor and employment, education, science and technology, agriculture, environment, health, ministers for emergencies, migration issues and so on. These high-level meetings have become an important tool for implementing decisions taken by the BRICS leaders, and the significance of their contribution to the development of cooperation between the BRICS countries is noted in the declarations of each summit. For example, the declaration of the BRICS summit in Johannesburg states,

We are satisfied with the results of ministerial conferences in various areas and look forward to the results of future meetings in 2018.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> BRICS Joint Statistical Publication, *supra* note 3.

<sup>15</sup> BRICS Johannesburg Declaration, Johannesburg, South Africa (2018) (Sep. 21, 2021), available at <https://www.gov.za/speeches/10th-brics-summit-johannesburg-declaration-27-jul-2018-0000>.

In addition, it has become a common practice for high-ranking officials of the BRICS countries to meet at major multilateral diplomatic events such as the U.N. General Assembly and G20 summits. Such meetings are the most important tool for developing pragmatic cooperation. At the third level of interaction, there are meetings of senior officials and working groups of the BRICS countries that provide technical support to cooperation, such as forums of state enterprises, forums on anti-corruption, science and technology, trade and economic issues, agriculture, justice, counter terrorism and drug trafficking, as well as urbanization. Furthermore, intellectual support for cooperation between the BRICS countries can be obtained from the BRICS Business Council, BRICS Council of Expert Centers, BRICS Expert Centers Forum, BRICS Business Forum, BRICS Financial Forum and other formats of cooperation. At the fourth level of interaction, there is direct contacts between the citizens of the BRICS countries through platforms such as the Forum of Young Scientists of BRICS Countries, the Conference of Small and Medium Enterprises of BRICS Countries, the BRICS Conference on Tourism, the BRICS Cities Friendship Forum, the BRICS Film Festival, and the BRICS Under-17 Football Championship, reflecting the importance of cultural exchanges and the associated opportunities for developing cooperation. The purpose of such interactions is to expand the scope of people-to-people exchanges between the BRICS countries, thereby creating favorable conditions for long-term cooperation and broadening the scope of the BRICS agenda.

## **6. Scope of the BRICS Agenda**

The four levels of the BRICS cooperation mechanism listed in the last section have distinct purposes, corresponding to the four main categories of the BRICS agenda, which are included in a single cooperation framework and serve as an important source for analyzing the activities of the association.

The BRICS scope has expanded significantly over the last several years. The pattern of cooperation formed within the BRICS is driven by three main themes: economics, politics and security, humanitarian exchanges. In comparison to the themes reflected in the declarations of the previous summits, the content and scope of the cooperation agenda of the BRICS countries continue to be enriched and grow.

Without a doubt, the main priority of the BRICS cooperation mechanism remains economic and financial cooperation, with the most notable results achieved in this area. The BRICS countries take a unified stance of major economic reforms, including: changes to the system of global reserve currencies; reforming the management system of international financial institutions; the need to replenish the resources of multilateral development banks; creating new financial “airbags”; implementing an effective supervision system that takes into account the positions of all participating economies and overcoming financial imbalances. The BRICS countries have made outstanding achievements in the field of financial and economic cooperation. First,



the BRICS countries continue to deepen their economic cooperation. Second, the creation of appropriate mechanisms marked the beginning of a new stage of financial cooperation among the BRICS countries. Third, the advancement of the BRICS countries in the reform of international financial institutions has resulted in an increase in the representation of emerging market and developing countries. In addition, the BRICS alliance offers effective solutions to many global issues, such as combating money laundering, anti-corruption cooperation, climate change, food security and energy, which helps to enhance the role of BRICS in global governance.

Political and security issues play an important role in the BRICS agenda. Concerning major international and regional issues, such as the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, the crisis in Syria, the Iranian nuclear issue, the crisis in Ukraine, the conflict in Yemen and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, the BRICS countries uphold the positions of emerging market and developing countries and call the parties involved to comply with the requirements of the U.N. Charter, international law and the basic principles of international relations, and strive to resolve conflicts through political and diplomatic methods. The BRICS countries are implementing joint counter-terrorism activities and are working to complete negotiations on the conclusion of a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism within the framework of the U.N. General Assembly. The emergence of BRICS has renewed discussions over peacekeeping and donor activities. On the one hand, BRICS countries adhere to the paradigm of the liberal world and its often neo-liberal attitudes, which allows them to advocate for the protection of sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, as well as to protect their trade and promote other interests. On the other hand, the increased active involvement of the BRICS countries in the peace and security agenda, as well as the deployment of their own donor and peacekeeping programs poses a challenge to the Euro-Atlantic structures dealing with peace and security and international development. In addition, a common understanding was reached between BRICS countries on issues such as the exploration and use of outer space, the fight against piracy and cybercrime. The BRICS countries also resolved to strengthen practical cooperation and information exchange in the areas of renewable energy production, peaceful uses of nuclear energy, climate change and food security.

The mission of BRICS is to broaden the scope of mutually enriching and mutually beneficial cooperation among the members of the association and to form a positive agenda on a wide range of issues. The cooperation of the BRICS countries on social and humanitarian issues is growing; channels of communication and humanitarian exchanges are constantly expanding in areas such as familiarization with each other's customs, cooperation of small and medium-sized enterprises, cooperation on gender equality, youth policy, education, culture, health care and strengthening friendship between cities.

To summarize, BRICS has gradually evolved from a "dialogue forum" focusing on global economic governance issues to a "comprehensive coordination mechanism"



dealing with political and economic governance issues, as well as general principles and practices of international cooperation.

## **7. Place in the System of International Relations**

The influence of BRICS as one of the relatively new forces in the world arena is constantly growing. As the experience of BRICS shows, the institutions of multilateral diplomacy have become an integral part of the modern system of international relations, and they are able to serve as instruments for solving various international problems that are beyond the strength of bilateral interstate relations.

BRICS as an alliance is characterized by the presence of open, dynamic, and diverse mechanisms. In practice, the BRICS countries have a two-way and multilateral dialogue system. This mechanism enables the BRICS countries to reach consensus on key global issues, and to create a flexible atmosphere in which no particular foreign policy behavior is imposed on one member of the bloc by another member. This culture and type of interaction will clearly have a greater impact on the relationship between the member states than traditional geopolitical and geo-economic ties. At the same time, this BRICS culture contributes today, and will undoubtedly continue to contribute in the future, to the formation of a new culture of modern international relations.

In general, BRICS could be viewed as a reflection of new methods of implementing multilateral diplomacy. This is a significant achievement for the official direction of the BRICS countries' policy. However, in today's realities, as BRICS tries to develop its own structure, strengthen its members, and organize their work from within in order to obtain all of the necessary mechanisms for its development, the existing cooperation between officials should only be strengthened. All the more so, it is clear that rivalry with other blocs and countries will be difficult and that competition in the economy leads to constant confrontation in politics. This is one of the main reasons why BRICS should not only focus on the economy but also include a wide range of issues in their work. Of course, the BRICS countries take this into account, but in order to gain more effective results, it should be accelerated.

As previously mentioned, all of the BRICS countries are experiencing economic growth. On the one hand, in terms of economic power, these countries are comparable to developed countries, owing to rapid economic growth and their significant role in the regional economy. On the other hand, the rapid economic development of the BRICS countries is of concern to Western countries. In the existing world political system, the BRICS countries are perceived as a new force in international relations, and they are sometimes referred to as "new" players, emphasizing that they are perceived as "aliens" in the existing international system. Recognizing their many objective similarities and common concerns, it appears that the BRICS countries have banded together to assert their role in the global system and defend their core interests in the globalizing community.

## 8. What Determines BRICS Success?

By 2020, the total GDP of the BRICS countries amounted to twenty-five percent of the global (\$21 trillion), and the share of international trade amounted to almost twenty percent (\$6.7 trillion). The mutual exports of the five BRICS countries grew by forty-five percent from 2015 to 2019. These figures confirm the strengthening of the positions of BRICS countries in the world economy. The activities of the association are already delivering tangible benefits to the citizens of its member states. Furthermore, the BRICS countries have successfully established the operational activities of the New Development Bank. For instance, in Russia, nine projects worth \$2.8 billion have already been approved. Moreover, the BRICS Energy Research Platform has been launched, which will allow for the ongoing promotion of joint investment projects in the energy sector. Currently, the Partnership for a New Industrial Revolution is also being created, which will allow for a formation of a mechanism for cooperation in the field of digitalization of industry and the training of highly qualified personnel. Among the other significant steps that could be mentioned are Russia's intentions to create its own cryptocurrency for use within the BRICS countries; in addition to the unified payment system and internal cryptocurrency, a special alliance for the development of artificial intelligence could be formed within the BRICS. Moreover, Russia is developing a digital platform for data exchange between scientists in BRICS. It will be used to select new research projects and create transnational teams of scientists. The solution will allow for the open exchange of scientific knowledge and data among teams of scientists. Cooperation between the BRICS countries in the field of collective information security including in the use of information and communication technologies receives special attention. The establishment of a unified cyber police is designed to aid in the organization of countering urgent cyber threats such as information terrorism and extremism, as well as information war operations and large-scale hacker attacks.

The impressive results gained by BRICS are determined, first and foremost, by similarities between the BRICS countries and their intentions for collaborative work. A significant number of them are listed below:

- A similar position of the five countries in the existing structure of international relations

Each of the five BRICS member states are developing countries with growing economies that have a shared influence in the regional configuration of development. These five countries can be regarded as “the third world in the first world” and “the first world in the third world” based on their level of development. Nevertheless, their development has thus far been mainly manifested only in the economic sphere. In terms of total power, the BRICS countries ranked significantly lower than the developed countries. For instance, neither of the BRICS countries is a member of the G7. BRICS cannot dictate the conditions for development to the international

community. In fact, the BRICS countries, by and large pursue a protectionist policy in order to ensure their national interests and act as a united front in relations with Western countries. In terms of aggregate power, the Third World countries cannot be compared to the BRICS countries. However, there is a significant difference in terms of development levels between the BRICS countries and developed countries.

- A common desire for multipolarity, a variety of forms of modern international order and a desire to increase its significance in international affairs

As a country's aggregate power increases, it seeks to protect its national interests and strives for such a status in the world arena that corresponds to its power. It is important to note that the national interests of states have a hierarchical structure: first, there are the interests of the survival of the state (the interests of national security) which are the fundamental interests of the country, followed by the interests of development (economic interests) and finally – the interests of state authority, as well as the ability to control one country over another. This formulation of the hierarchical nature of national interests has proven to be relevant in the BRICS countries. In the current world economic structure, as embodied in the international organizations of developed countries, developing countries do not have a sufficient number of quotas and votes. In other words, they are not a significant force for influencing decision-making in the global economy. Naturally, the current unjust order is unfavorable for the new growing economies. As a result, in terms of external political and economic relations, the BRICS countries are oriented towards multipolarity in world politics and reducing the dominant role of the West in international affairs in order to strengthen its role in the global political and economic process. This is the primary goal of the joint diplomatic efforts of the BRICS countries, which are sometimes referred to as "BRICS-specific diplomacy."

- A similar approach to resolving confrontational issues

In the settlement of international conflict, the BRICS countries are unequivocally committed to using only diplomatic and negotiation methods and they are categorically opposed to violent interference in the internal affairs of any country.

- A similar foreign policy orientation aimed at democratizing international relations and opposing hegemony and an unjust world order

As previously stated, due to their rapid rise, new growing economies will undoubtedly compete for a place in the international community that is proportionate to their economic strength. It appears that in the modern international structure these requirements the demands of growing economies are met with great difficulty. In this regard, phrases such as "democratization of international relations" and "against hegemonism" are frequently used as the foreign policy slogans of the BRICS countries. Overall, the priority for BRICS is the development of full-fledged relations with the West, since the BRICS countries are not yet in a position to resist the West or to cooperate with Western countries on an equal footing. As a result, the BRICS countries are at a similar stage of development, share similar goals and

have proposed a non-Western development model known as the “BRICS-specific development path.”

- BRICS countries are regional centers; they play an important role in the regional governance of the world

The BRICS countries are the locomotives of regional development, representing developing countries from different continents. Brazil has been a pioneer of economic development in Latin America, whereas Russia, located in Eastern Europe and North Asia, is at the core of Eurasian integration. There is every reason to believe that the BRICS countries, being the centers of development in different regions of the world, will be able to play a significant role in regional governance. The trans-regional BRICS bloc has the potential to become a “collective pole” in a multipolar international structure, as well as a “collective great power” among the great powers of the world.

- In the BRICS countries, the system of political governance is centralized

The industrial revolution in modern and recent times has led to industrialization on a global scale. If the BRICS countries are to achieve economic recovery in a relatively short period of time, they will need a centralized model of political governance in order to use all necessary resources precisely for the development of priority sectors or those areas that can bring substantial economic benefit. In this regard, the centralized political model of governance in the BRICS countries differs significantly from the decentralized power relations in Western countries.

- Similarity of the stages of development of BRICS countries

The BRICS countries are currently at a similar stage of development, transitioning from the group of middle-income countries to the group of high-income countries.<sup>16</sup> The urgent task for most of the BRICS countries, which are middle-income countries, is to avoid the “middle-income trap,” which is characterized by stratification into rich and poor, uneven income distribution, corruption, exacerbation of social contradictions, and so on. A transitional stage in development is distinguished by problems and new challenges that require intellectual efforts to find a reasonable solution. If the necessary measures are not taken, economic and social development may stagnate or even regress. The “middle income trap” phenomenon refers to the fact that some countries and regions remain for an extended period of time at a low average income level. Some countries and regions advanced quickly from the low-middle-income status, but failed to establish a firm foothold in the group of high-middle-income countries. The BRICS countries can use their collective experiences and practices to help each other to improve their positions in this regard.

- Similar desire to institutionalize and improve the organizational level of the BRICS countries

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<sup>16</sup> БРИКС // Tadviser. 17 декабря 2020 г. [BRICS, Tadviser, 17 December 2020] (Sep. 21, 2021), available at [https://www.tadviser.ru/index.php/%D0%A1%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8C%D1%8F:%D0%91%D0%A0%D0%98%D0%9A\\_\(%D0%91%D0%A0%D0%98%D0%9A%D0%A1\)](https://www.tadviser.ru/index.php/%D0%A1%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8C%D1%8F:%D0%91%D0%A0%D0%98%D0%9A_(%D0%91%D0%A0%D0%98%D0%9A%D0%A1)).

BRICS cooperation in the field of institutionalization has already yielded significant results. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, the BRICS mechanisms are still in their initial stages of institutionalization with no secretariat or other relevant bodies in place to ensure their functioning as a full-fledged international organization. However, under the current conditions, multi-level contacts and cooperation within BRICS are constantly deepening. Throughout this process, all the BRICS countries pay attention not only to strengthening cooperation but also to expanding external relations with other international organizations.

- BRICS countries have one more distinct feature – complementarity of energy

As the world's most dynamic economies, the energy consumption of the BRICS countries is understandably high. While, India, China and South Africa are energy importers, Brazil and Russia are energy exporters. In this regard, the existing transregional complementarity between the importers and exporters of BRICS in the energy sector is reflected in improved energy security, the development of new types of energy, the development of energy technologies and an increased role in global energy governance. The existing energy complementarity contributes to the cooperation of BRICS countries, both bilaterally and multilaterally. The goal of close cooperation in the energy field is to create a sustainable discussion and coordination mechanism on energy issues within BRICS. Specific steps have already been taken in this regard.

### **9. Priority Areas of BRICS Cooperation in the New Development Strategy**

One of the most pressing issues for BRICS today is determining the next step in its development. Without a doubt, economic cooperation remains the most important area for strengthening ties. Thus, the adoption of the new BRICS Economic Partnership Strategy is of central importance. It is also important to pay special attention to the activities of the BRICS New Development Bank, which has been in operation since 2016.

The fundamental elements of the BRICS Development Strategy are digitalization trends, expanding economic opportunities for countries, sustainable growth of individual industries within the framework of the seventeen United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. At some point in the changing landscape, there were attempts to rethink the relevance of these areas. When it comes to the Sustainable Development Goals, despite the fact that they are all interconnected, one of the most important is becoming the goal of social development as a result of the corona crisis. It is necessary for the BRICS member states to coordinate national policies in order to face the global problems, such as the epidemics that have affected the entire world or changed the patterns and directions of development.

The digital transformation area is becoming another priority, owing to the fact that the consumption system has changed dramatically, and that a significant portion

of trade has moved to electronic form. BRICS needs to agree on comprehensive measures and rules for digital services as part of its framework. Agriculture, food production, biotechnology and public medicine are all examples of areas where the innovative agenda should be implemented. In addition, the development of innovations in the industrial economy, particularly in the production and consumption of energy, is necessary not only because it reflects the interests of the growing economies of the BRICS countries, but also because the rest of the world cannot repeat the Western path – the planet will not withstand the anthropogenic load.<sup>17</sup> The answer to this problem is closely related to the issue of environmental protection. This topic will be discussed further below.

However, the pandemic did not cause any fundamentally new challenges for the BRICS countries. The coronavirus crisis, as well as another serious issue, the U.S.-China trade war largely served to actualize the existing ones.

In the third decade of the twenty-first century, BRICS needs to position itself as a full-fledged instrument of global governance, and one of the priorities of its development should be to establish a permanent institutionalized dialogue with third countries, primarily in the BRICS plus format. Among other priorities, should be strengthening cooperation in the security sphere. BRICS has already accomplished a lot in this area, as well as in terms of coordinating positions and “speaking the same language.” When we compare the ability of BRICS to negotiate with the ability of the G20 or G7, BRICS clearly wins. The current trends in global development make cooperation on security issues even more relevant. For instance, the United States confrontational policy towards China and Russia will continue for a long time, which complicates cooperation on security issues at the global level and increases the risks of bloc polarization. The United Nations Security Council is in a state of inaction. The G20 has become hostage to the conflict between the United States and China. Traditional Western-centric institutions of global governance are losing their effectiveness as selfishness and mercantilism become more prevalent in politics. Globally, the management deficit is growing. In this regard, BRICS, by the very fact of its existence, has a stabilizing effect on international relations. The organization includes both, countries that the United States has declared as its main rivals, and countries that the United States considers to be key partners, such as India. On this basis, BRICS reduces the risk of global polarization. At the same time, it should not turn into an anti-American club; rather it should have a unifying effect on international relations. Accordingly, it is in the interest of BRICS to reduce the governance deficit at the global level, independently propose rules for interaction on security issues and promote them at the global level. BRICS should complement, not replace, global governance by proposing rules and regimes that may be necessary,

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<sup>17</sup> Яшкова Т.А. БРИКС: место и роль в изменяющемся мире // КиберЛенинка [Т.А. Iashkova, *BRICS: Place and Role in a Changing World*, CyberLeninka] (Sep. 21, 2021), available at <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/briks-mesto-i-rol-v-izmenyayuschemsya-mire/viewer>.

but impossible to implement in other, more traditional institutions. BRICS should be openly positioned not only as a forum of dialogue between the five countries about issues of mutual interest, but also as an institution of global governance ready and capable of taking on this role.

On the other hand, the threat of war is objectively increasing around the world, with the escalation of an unintentional non-nuclear clash in the “gray zone” of the cyber sphere type. The arms control system is in desperate need of a major upgrade. Furthermore, it is a completely unconventional area for BRICS, but non-nuclear weapons are now the primary concern of strategic stability. As a result, it would be especially beneficial for BRICS to accept and promote the global rules of responsible behavior in military aspects, information and communication technologies. The focus of BRICS work should be not on tougher arms control regimes, but on the rules of conduct in the non-nuclear sphere and strengthening confidence-building measures. Moreover, there is a rise in transnational security challenges. Threats such as international terrorism are used for great power competitions. The pandemic and environmental issues are being used as a form of information warfare against geopolitical rivals. All these dangers are a threat to the BRICS countries. Because BRICS as an organization is a non-military alliance, it is much better suited to combating transnational threats. However, due to its nature of economic cooperation, an effective fight against such threats only within the BRICS bloc is impossible. It is important to recognize that exclusivity leads to marginalization. As a result, the main priority for BRICS should be the development of the “BRICS plus” and “outreach” formats. Partner countries could include non-Western G20 members who are not BRICS members, for example, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, but not only them; the list of countries depends on the specific issues on which BRICS should strengthen interaction.

In light of the coronavirus pandemic and other widespread diseases, biological safety has become an additional pressing issue for cooperation in BRICS. Unfortunately, the countries’ interaction on these issues is insufficient within the BRICS framework. However, it is necessary to consider the assistance that the countries can provide to their partners in the organization. In addition to discussing the creation of a five-way Vaccine Center, it is necessary to cooperate on the development of testing systems. It is also advisable to think about creating under the auspices of BRICS or the G20 an international bank for the advancement of research in the field of epidemiology. In addition, within the BRICS format, it is necessary to develop principles and rules of international cooperation in preventing epidemics, to interact on the supply of drugs and testing means, to develop principles for the price regulation of drugs and medical devices, as well as customs regulation rules, because there are problems with other diseases such as HIV and AIDS in Africa, tuberculosis and others, including endemic diseases in India and China, cardiovascular diseases in Russia, mental health issues in Brazil and so on. Because the number of problems that need to be addressed is enormous, BRICS has a large field to work on in the healthcare sector, including a more expanded format.



The next important area for cooperation within the BRICS format is ecology. Environmental issues are deeply embedded in the economic specialization of the BRICS countries and closely linked to economic growth models. Thus, here we have several fundamental issues:

- BRICS could use a conceptual framework for the basis of a “green economy”;
- Bio economics is a promising area, but investments in this area are minimal;
- BRICS has a monopoly in the field of bio economy.

Taking into account the aforementioned, the main mission of BRICS should be the development of economic growth models that pay special attention to environmental constraints. The primary source of environmental problems is growing consumption, so it must be limited, and BRICS needs to raise this issue for global discussion. Because Western countries are the primary consumers and the BRICS countries are the primary producers, the scale of environmental problems in the latter is greater. Consumption patterns need to be adjusted globally. The Sustainable Development Goals should be revised, making them systemic, and priorities should be changed. When it comes to proposals for BRICS in this sphere, we can focus on the following:

- Solving environmental problems using elements of a progressive tax;
- Coordinated work on the development of international standards for “green financing” (in the BRICS countries it is the cheapest way to reduce emissions);
- Joint efforts to create new models of economic development that take into account economic constraints.

In general, we can state that the BRICS countries can contribute to the search for solutions for a number of world problems. They all support the establishment of a multipolar world order, based on the norms of international law, the principles of democracy and ensuring human rights, rejection of the practice of “humanitarian intervention,” and take a collective approach to solving global problems and resolving regional conflicts. To become a stable international institution in the formation of a multipolar world system, BRICS has to focus on issues such as international trade, economic and investment cooperation, reforming the obsolete monetary and financial architecture and establishing a more democratic and equitable international financial and economic order, instilling modern methods of network diplomacy, strengthening cooperation in security area, including the field of information security, counter cyber-terrorism and cyber-crime, both within the BRICS format and within the framework of global and regional organizations, as well as making joint efforts within the U.N. and other institutions to coordinate the fight against drug trafficking. BRICS must also give attention to the creation and strengthening of their external relations with leading developing countries and international organizations, and foster cooperation on the basis of equality, complementarity and mutual benefit in the economic, scientific, and technical fields, taking into account the significant resource base their countries have. Their enormous labor resources, capacious domestic markets, economic modernization and high technology goals, and food



and energy safety measures, will give BRICS the opportunity to form an effective development strategy to gain a foothold in the multipolar world order.

The advancement of the development of BRICS in the future can be carried out only on the basis of the collective efforts of all the BRICS countries. The reasons for this are as follows: China is rich in economic resources, but it has little experience of international cooperation; Russia has a fairly large military potential and natural resources, but it does not have sufficient economic power; India has a democratic political system, but it lacks the aggregate power corresponding to large developed democracies; and Brazil and South Africa, despite being leaders in their respective regions cannot bear the burden of full international responsibility. Thus, there is every reason to hope that with the strengthening of all BRICS countries, a truly highly institutionalized trans-regional international organization will gradually emerge in the international community over time.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the difficulties that the BRICS countries have faced, it is generally accepted that the potential and competitive advantages of the BRICS countries in terms of available resources, market size and labor force have been preserved, and the long-term prospects remain promising. The BRICS countries are urged to follow developing historical trends, seize new opportunities for development, work together to address existing challenges and play a constructive role in establishing a new type of international relations and a “community of the common destiny of mankind.”

The current world political situation and the state of inter-economic cooperation between the peoples of different countries are among the important external factors that continually influence changes in the BRICS agenda. Additionally, changes in the global agenda under the U.N. Charter and the G20 are also important factors shaping the scope of BRICS interaction. The level of development of interaction within BRICS is characterized by the maturity of the agenda and the established mechanism of cooperation, as well as the expansion of the list of substantive topics for cooperation.

In the foreseeable future, the economic component will remain the priority in BRICS development. However, measures aimed at strengthening multilateralism and advancing the reform of global governance will take a prominent place on the BRICS agenda. In addition, the BRICS countries should recognize that cultural cooperation is the primary driving force behind the fourth industrial revolution, and it offers significant opportunities for economic development.

Due to modern challenges (such as the Covid-19 pandemic), BRICS should pay special attention to the healthcare system, as well as continue to expand the scope of humanitarian exchanges and cooperation and make full use of opportunities for interaction in multilateral cooperation. The updated Strategy until 2025 already

includes the following areas of cooperation among the BRICS countries: sustainable trade, investments without barriers and sanctions, the development of the digital economy in the interests of people, as well as sustainable growth and balanced development in the fields of climate, energy, spatial development, human capital and food security. The focus of the future BRICS agenda, along with topics that will arise based on the internal development priorities of BRICS, may include issues such as expanding the membership of the association, linking cooperation within BRICS with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the digital economy as a key element of the BRICS development agenda.

Looking back at the history of BRICS cooperation over the last decade, it should be noted that the countries participating in the alliance demonstrated their sincerity to develop interactions with BRICS partners, allowing for the formation of various cooperation mechanisms. The active participation of the BRICS countries in international cooperation has become an important experience for all developing countries around the world and has made a significant contribution to the development of North-South cooperation.

Over the next decade, BRICS should focus on extending cooperation among developing countries, actively participating in global governance, expanding and deepening pragmatic cooperation, as well as cooperation among the BRICS countries on sustainable development issues and broadening the list of partner-countries and organizations, all of which would allow BRICS to gain a foothold in a multipolar world order as a successful, fully-fledged international alliance.

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