

CONFERENCE REVIEW NOTES

FORUM OF POLITICAL PARTIES, THINK TANKS AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS OF THE BRICS GROUP*

ELENA GLADUN,

Tyumen State University (Tyumen, Russia)

DOI: 10.21684/2412-2343-2017-4-3-136-143

Recommended citation: Elena Gladun, *Forum of Political Parties, Think Tanks and Non-Governmental Organizations of the BRICS Group*, 4(3) BRICS Law Journal 136–143 (2017).

Introduction

The Joint International Forum of Political Parties, Think Tanks and Non-Governmental Organizations of the BRICS took place in *Fuzhou, China* on 10–12 June 2017. The event was hosted jointly by the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the China Council for BRICS Think Tank Cooperation and the China NGO Network for International Exchanges.

For the first time in the story of BRICS cooperation the countries' representatives witnessed the renewed format of the BRICS Academic Forum – two traditional tracks (academic conference and civil track) were supplemented by the assembly of political parties. Taking its turn in chairing the multinational BRICS association in 2017, China proposed this new Forum format and joined together three dialogues that had grown out of the BRICS Academic Forum, which took place now for the ninth time.¹ Another innovation on China's part was the outreach format – representatives of

* This paper is prepared in cooperation with the National Committee for BRICS Research, Russia.

¹ Национальный комитет по исследованию БРИКС [National Committee for BRICS Research] (Sep. 15, 2017), available at <http://www.nkibrics.ru/posts/show/58d4e3056272697138150000>.

28 countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Cambodia, Egypt, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Argentina, Chile and Mexico among others took part.

The Joint International Forum was a truly large-scale international event – 37 political parties of 26 countries, 105 think tanks, and over 400 representatives of 79 civil society organizations were in attendance.²

The Forum participants engaged in separate deliberations at the BRICS Academic Forum on *“Pooling Wisdom and New Ideas for Cooperation,”* the BRICS Civil Society Organizations Forum on *“Stronger People-to-People Bond for Better Cooperation,”* and the BRICS Political Parties Dialogue on the *“Guiding Role of Political Parties in Promoting Cooperation.”* The Forum was a complete success with broad consensus.

1. Background of the BRICS Academic Forum

The first meeting of BRIC think tanks was organized in 2009 in New Delhi. This was a preparatory event for the first BRIC Summit, in Yekaterinburg, Russia. The Academic Forum was officially approved in 2010 during the BRIC countries second summit in Brazil (the “S,” for South Africa, in today’s BRICS was only added in 2011). The Forum was designed as a channel for civil society and academia with regard to issues of importance to these countries. Since then the Academic Forum has taken place systematically.³

Today the BRICS Academic Forum is an annual event preceding the BRICS Summit in the host country. The BRICS Academic Forum is a Track II platform for academicians from the five countries to deliberate on issues of crucial importance to BRICS, and to exchange ideas and come up with recommendations. The Foreign Affairs Ministry of each country designates an institution that should be responsible for forming a group of researchers to participate as a country delegation to the meeting. The Forum invites scholars from each member nation to speak on important themes. In addition, a large number of scholars from other countries participate in the debates.⁴

The BRICS Academic Forum is an important initiative, as it provides one of the channels through which the civil society can make explicit its views on relevant issues.⁵ Also, it is a platform where experts and scholars of the academic communities from the member countries meet and engage in the free exchange of ideas and thematic discussions. In this respect, the Forum has three main objectives: (1) to deepen collaboration in respect of research of mutual interest; (2) to establish networks between academic and civil communities; and (3) to provide BRICS leaders with a research resource in respect of issues under discussion at the BRICS Summit.

² WN.com – China news (Sep. 15, 2017), available at http://overheaped.rssing.com/chan-1983001/all_p3554.html.

³ *VI BRICS Academic Forum 319* (6th ed., R.C.B. das Neves, T.G. de Farias (eds.), Rio de Janeiro: IPEA, 2014).

⁴ Observer Research Foundation, Events (Sep. 15, 2017), available at <http://www.orfonline.org/research/brics-academic-forum-2016/>.

⁵ *VI BRICS Academic Forum*, *supra* note 3, at 13.

The aim is therefore to encourage academic exchange, strengthen dialogue with civil society, as well as provide policy advice.

The main outcomes of the debates are submitted to the heads of States at their meetings. Presumably, this should be a contribution in terms of identifying new dimensions and issues for further action by the five countries.⁶

2. Summary of the 9th BRICS Academic Forum

The political parties, think tanks, and civil society organizations from BRICS and several developing countries met in Fuzhou on 10–12 June 2017, to exchange views and share experiences on issues of common interest, with an aim to enhance cooperation among BRICS countries and with other emerging markets and developing countries.

The 9th BRICS Academic Forum took place on the square of the Fuzhou International Exhibition Congress Center. During the two-day event more than 60 speeches and presentations were given covering the following topics: challenges and possibilities for developing BRICS in new circumstances, search for innovative methods of strengthening the mechanisms of collaboration within BRICS, strategy for deepening cooperation among the five countries, the development of South-South collaboration, and global management.

The yearly *meeting of the BRICS Think Tanks Council* took place on 10 June during the run-up to the Forum. The results of the work done by the academic track in 2016 with India's chairing of BRICS were presented by the Vice President of the Observer Research Foundation (India), *Samir Saran*. Mr. Saran noted that the primary objective of BRICS in the present day is to institutionalize the association in two dimensions: create accessory mechanisms for developing new BRICS institutions (such as the BRICS New Development Bank) and initiate collaboration in new fields of cooperation. For instance, in 2016 India initiated a new framework for collaboration among BRICS cities with the goal of developing regions (the "BRICS Smart Cities" International Seminar). India's representatives also presented a new joint report prepared by the BRICS Think Tanks Council, "*BRICS Long-term Goals: A Roadmap and Paths for Development*," which reflected the primary objectives for developing BRICS in the long run.⁷

That same day, the General Secretary of the National Council for Collaboration among BRICS Think Tanks and Director of the Research Center for the International Division of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), *Luan Zhangchang*, spoke on the prevailing topics – the consolidation of the Chinese expert community and the achievements of the Chinese leadership in developing new frameworks for collaboration.⁸

⁶ VI BRICS Academic Forum, *supra* note 3, at 9.

⁷ Valeria Gorbacheva, *Vyacheslav Nikonov: BRICS Will Never Retire*, *Russkiy Mir*, 26 June 2017 (Sep. 15, 2017), available at <http://russkiymir.ru/en/publications/226529/>.

⁸ Zhang Rui, *Fuzhou Initiative Appeals for Greater BRICS Cooperation*, *China.org.cn*, 13 June 2017 (Sep. 15, 2017), available at http://www.china.org.cn/china/2017-06/13/content_41018235.htm.

The head of the Research Council for the Humanities and the BRICS South African Research Centre, *Ari Citas*, commented that BRICS had “grown up” as a full-fledged framework for deepening collaboration, with BRICS issues being studied and discussed in many international and national research centers. The efforts of expert communities in the five countries would stand at the avant-garde of the association’s development. In the opinion of South Africa’s representatives, the primary concerns for BRICS cooperation in the next decade should be: economic flourishing, stable development, forming a new world order, and generating new knowledge. *Marcos Diego*, the Assistant Secretary of Foreign Affairs in the administration of the Brazilian President, paid special attention to the problem of cooperation between expert communities and the governments of BRICS countries.⁹ The Executive Director of the Russian National Committee for BRICS Research and Director of Regional Programs at the Russkiy Mir Foundation, *Georgy Toloraya*, shared his thoughts on the necessity to establish closer connections between the first and second BRICS pathways. Professor Toloraya highlighted the role of the international expert community in developing the BRICS agenda and marked two basic problems in the operation of the BRICS Think Tanks Council. The first is limited resources for changing the government decision-making process at the domestic level. The second problem is the need for collaboration not only among researchers, but also with the public.¹⁰

During the two-day Forum, discussions centered on ways to cement cooperation and share governance experience, and suggestions were offered for the 9th BRICS Summit, which is scheduled for *September* in *Xiamen, Fujian Province*.¹¹ The key speakers at the 9th Academic Forum pointed out that BRICS countries should intensify policy communication, expand the scope of cooperation, increase and deepen cooperation with other emerging markets and developing countries, combat corruption, and build clean governance. The participants of the BRICS Political Parties, Think Tanks and Civil Society Organizations Forum also expressed the view that people-to-people and cultural exchanges play an important role in strengthening BRICS strategic partnership and cooperation.¹²

Liu Yunshan, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, when addressing the Forum participants, mentioned that the BRICS group has become a key platform of cooperation for emerging markets and developing countries, as well as an important driver for boosting global economic growth and perfecting global governance.¹³

⁹ Gorbacheva, *supra* note 7.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ BRICS Political Parties, Think Tanks, Non-Governmental Organizations to Cement Cooperation, Xinhua, 12 June 2017 (Sep. 15, 2017), available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-06/12/c_136359760.htm.

¹² Rui, *supra* note 8.

¹³ Zhang Yue, *Subgroups of BRICS Brainstorm at Meeting*, China Daily, 12 June 2017 (Sep. 15, 2017), available at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-06/12/content_29709914.htm.

At the opening session, *Luan Jianzhang*, the Director-General of the research office of the International Department of the CPC spoke on the importance of information technology (IT). He highlighted the robust development of IT and the speed it offers for the dissemination of information, and consequently the importance for BRICS to take innovative steps in exploring new avenues of cooperation. *Liu Yong*, Chief Economist of the China Development Bank, during his talk pointed out that financial innovation was one key topic under think tank discussion in this year's Forum that aims at making financing under the BRICS framework more efficient. *Marcos Degaut*, Deputy Special Secretary of Strategic Affairs with Brazil's presidential office, noted that bringing political parties into the dialogue would be of great help in perfecting the BRICS framework under the new international situation. He was sure that trends such as rising protectionism can pose challenges to the BRICS dialogue mechanism, which makes communication between political parties and think tanks even more important.¹⁴

Recommendations accepted by the 9th Academic Forum approved for governing authorities and leaders of BRICS countries covered nearly 50 points concerning reforms of the system of global economic management, developing a partnership strategy for BRICS countries, preserving global peace and security, reinforcing cooperation among governments in economic and social development, taking advantage of the possibilities created by multilateral institutions for advancing infrastructure projects, decisions concerning innovation and technology, collaboration in the industrial and agricultural sectors, and assistance in strengthening humanitarian collaboration and improving cooperation within the BRICS mechanism. These recommendations will be transmitted to Sherpas to prepare the documents for the summit of BRICS leaders in Xiamen in September 2017.

The Forum of Civil Society Organizations of BRICS Countries was organized in session meetings, with more than 30 presentations made. The hot topic was the development of humanitarian cooperation among BRICS countries, as well as the interaction among civil society organizations and the role of NGOs in raising the profile of developing countries in international affairs, among others.¹⁵ NGOs have a special mission within the BRICS group, which is to prioritize cooperation in poverty alleviation, health and environmental protection, promote the implementation of more projects with social and economic benefits, and make full use of new technology to build a network for interactions and cooperation.¹⁶

A Dialogue of BRICS Financial and Business Structures was held in parallel with the BRICS Academic Forum. The participants discussed financial reforms, cooperation among financial markets in the BRICS countries, and the role of innovation in deepening collaboration among the five countries in the area of industrial production.

¹⁴ Yue, *supra* note 13.

¹⁵ Gorbacheva, *supra* note 7.

¹⁶ BRICS Political Parties, *supra* note 11.

For the first time Fuzhou was host city for the Forum of Political Parties of BRICS Countries. The Communist Party of China initiated a dialogue among representatives of the political parties of the other countries of the “leading five,” including the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party, the United Russia Party, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the A Just Russia Party, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, the Indian People’s Party, and the South African Communist Party, among others.

At the closing ceremony, *Song Tao*, Head of the International Department of the CPC Central Committee, outlined that BRICS political parties, think tanks, and non-governmental organizations should facilitate cooperation that will elevate BRICS members to their role as practitioners of new globalization, advocates for new global governance, and forerunners of new South-South cooperation. “BRICS should promote the Belt and Road Initiative, to inject new vitality to BRICS cooperation,” he said.¹⁷

Vyacheslav Nikonov, the head of the Russian delegation, depicted the image of BRICS as the five fingers of a hand, which come together as a fist:

We have become stronger in many respects due to us being together. To make people listen to you, you don’t have to drop your fist into the matter – it’s enough simply to show it. We showed that together we are a powerful force in contemporary politics.

In the politician’s opinion, the voices of the younger generation should be heard more often:

Sooner or later, we will all retire, but BRICS will continue its existence. BRICS will never retire.¹⁸

Based on the results of the Forum, a declaration titled “*Fuzhou Initiative*” was approved.

3. Fuzhou Initiative

The outcome of the Joint International Forum was the “*Fuzhou Initiative*,” a document released at the closing ceremony, in which the participants vowed to intensify policy communication, expand cooperation, and work more with other emerging markets and developing countries. The Forum members recognized that BRICS cooperation has yielded fruitful outcomes in political, economic, cultural, and many other fields, making important contributions to promoting world economic growth, improving global economic governance, and safeguarding the overall

¹⁷ BRICS Political Parties, *supra* note 11.

¹⁸ Gorbacheva, *supra* note 7.

interests of developing countries. BRICS cooperation has become an example of cooperation among emerging markets and developing countries.¹⁹

According to the document, BRICS should boost political, cultural, and security cooperation, have its voice heard on major international and regional issues, improve cyber security cooperation, enhance the sharing of intelligence and experience in countering terrorism, and jointly work towards combating extremism, separatism, narcotics trafficking, piracy, and organized crime.²⁰

“The deepening of all-round practical cooperation and the realization of mutual benefits and win-win results serve as an important foundation for BRICS partnership,” the document stated. “BRICS countries should prioritize pragmatism and innovation in their cooperation in a manner that addresses the key social and economic challenges affecting their own countries respectively.”²¹

With cooperation and political exchange issues, the Initiative stressed three main areas of the BRICS group efforts:

1) *Corruption*: Combating corruption and building a clean government are an important aspect of a country’s domestic governance. BRICS and other developing countries should strengthen exchanges in this area and deepen international cooperation against corruption.

2) *Culture*: People-to-people and cultural exchanges play an important role in cementing BRICS strategic partnership and garnering public support for BRICS cooperation. Enjoying rich cultural resources, BRICS countries should capitalize on their respective advantages to actively engage in and collectively promote ever-deepening and substantial people-to-people and cultural exchanges, so as to effectively enhance engagement and a sense of recognition of the peoples of BRICS countries.

3) *Terrorism*: In countering terrorism, BRICS countries should enhance the sharing of intelligence and experience as well as capacity building. BRICS countries should also increase cooperation in cyber security and promote the development of Internet technologies and the governance of cyberspace globally.

The Initiative pointed out three main actors fostering boarder partnerships – *political parties, think tanks, and civil society organizations*. Political parties play a critical role in fostering popular support and providing guidance in the political life of a country. Political parties of BRICS countries should shoulder political responsibilities, uphold the spirit of openness, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation, and build and constantly improve institutionalized platforms for exchanges and cooperation to provide solid political guarantees for BRICS cooperation. The main objectives of political parties in BRICS countries are to increase exchanges and dialogues with their counterparts in other emerging markets and developing countries, to share

¹⁹ Fuzhou Initiative (Sep. 15, 2017), available at http://ris.org.in/pdf/Fushou_Initiative.pdf.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Rui, *supra* note 8.

experience in governance and build consensus on cooperation, and to steadily consolidate and expand the basis for cooperation.

Think tanks, with their great strength in brainpower, operate as contributors, practitioners, and messengers of policies in all nations. Built on the remarkable cooperation achievements over the past decade, BRICS think tanks should innovate the modalities, enrich the content, and improve the quality of cooperation with a view to turning out superior joint research reports and institutionalizing their cooperation to probe the direction, identify the pathway, and broaden the basis for cooperation.

Civil society organizations play a significant role in heeding and channeling people's demands as well as in strengthening people-to-people bonds. By engaging in BRICS cooperation, civil society organizations should take proactive actions to reflect people's opinions, prioritize further cooperation in poverty alleviation, health and environmental protection, promote gender equality, and drive the implementation of more projects with social and economic benefits.

Conclusion

As stated in the Fuzhou Initiative, the Forum turned out to be of great significance and will help successfully usher in the second decade for BRICS cooperation. The main conclusion is that the BRICS group needs to improve and harmonize various cooperation mechanisms to foster broader partnerships, to which political parties, think tanks, and civil society organizations are to contribute their wisdom and strength. The Academic Forum serves as the most effective instrument here as it enhances the dissemination of accurate information about the development of BRICS vis-à-vis other countries, within the association itself, as well as in opposition to inimical criticism at both levels – international and national. It is crucial to preserve the consolidated work of the BRICS think tanks studying the problems in the interaction between the five countries, and to overcome the deficit of information that has built up regarding realized projects and studies that largely duplicate each other due to a lack of a unified field of information.

The Recommendations worked out at the Forum will be submitted to the upcoming BRICS Summit in Xiamen scheduled for September 2017.

The next Academic and Civil Forum of the BRICS countries will be hosted by *South Africa in 2018*.

Information about the author

Elena Gladun (Tyumen, Russia) – Associate Professor, Finance and Public Law Department, Tyumen State University (6 Volodarskogo St., Tyumen, 625003, Russia; e-mail: efgladun@yandex.ru).