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The Durban BRICS Summit: Advancing Co-operation among Emerging Sovereign Powers

Carolina MILHORANCE DE CASTRO

Recent evolutions within the international arena have created a wave of diplomatic clubs among emerging States, like the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). This is a political forum of industrialised, large, fast-growing economies with significant influence in regional and global matters. These emerging powers have assumed a proactive presence in several multilateral contexts aiming at promoting normative and operational changes. Propelling a multipolar order while expanding their recognition within the international system, the effort by emerging nations has been gradual, disordered and uneven (Hirst, 2012). This effort has primarily been generated at their annual summit for the Heads of State, the most recent one being the fifth such Summit of BRICS at Durban, South Africa, in March 2013.

The proliferation of selective groupings including Brazil, India, South Africa and China (BRICS, IBSA, BASIC) represent a result of their new identity which is situated on the frontier of North and South. This could also be a product of their double identity as rapidly-growing economies challenged by domestic social problems such as poverty (Soule-Kohndou, 2013). This diplomatic activism cannot be considered a systematic phenomena and it reflects the heterogeneity of the South. In this context, BRICS is a nascent, informal grouping and its agenda is evolving and flexible. Nevertheless, they constitute themselves as representing the South within global governance arenas (UN, WTO) symbolically employing the Third World political discourse, but, acquiring credibility through their increasing economic weight (Soule-Kohndou, 2013).

In this regard, this article intends to discuss the political cohesion of the BRICS and its way forward as a group, drawing upon their engagement with African countries and recent developments towards the creation of an operational platform for dialogue and collaboration. With this objective, the text provides an overview of the evolution of the BRICS, from the acronym launched by Goldman Sachs in 2011 to a reality which is reflected in the growing interaction between the five countries. The paper aims to show that BRICS is still uneven and competitive, despite economic similarities. However, increasing initiatives

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to foster experiences, knowledge and cultural exchanges combined with growing economic co-operation and the common aim to democratize international institutions lay a firm foundation for a more functional and integrate community. The observations are derived from bibliographical data, interviews, analysis of Declarations and speeches from BRICS officials and leaders, as well as participation at the 5th BRICS Academic Forum.

1. MATERIAL AND SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCTION OF BRICS

The term BRICs was coined by the Chief Economist of Goldman Sachs, in 2001, in a paper titled «Building Better Global Economic BRICs». Jim O’Neill suggested a healthier outlook on some of the larger emerging economies compared with the G7, given an increasingly important role in the global economy. The concept of “emergence” was seen essentially as a market-driven phenomenon that reflected deep changes in the structure of global economy as well as making the “right” economic policy choices. Expectations were for the Chinese economy surpass Germany’s in a couple of years and the other BRIC economies to surpass the size of all large EU member states. The acronym was updated to BRICS when South Africa joined the group in 2011. Together, these five countries account for more than 40 per cent of the global population, nearly 30 per cent of the land mass, and a share in world GDP (PPP) that has increased from 16 per cent in 2000 to nearly 25 per cent in 2010 (BRICS, 2012).

According to Fourcade (2013) the common feature of the group is that they have weathered the blow-ups in the United States and Europe and that this pattern of resilience has legitimated a posteriori its conceptual coherence. However, the group BRICs has never been defined in a wholly positive light, by the size of their economies or rapid economic growth. What has made these countries look like a coherent group was also a communality of exclusion: « there seemed to be no place for them in the ideological frameworks and governance structures of the world economy » (Fourcade, 2013, 261). Their purpose was denouncing this exclusion and questioning the leadership of the world economic order.

Although the material criteria of economic emergence represent a significant element of the group’s formation, they do not automatically create sufficient conditions for increasing influence within international institutions. According to Soule-Kohndou (2010), economic emergence does not necessarily result in diplomatic emergence which is likewise related to a well-defined foreign policy strategy aiming at the reform of global governance with broader participation of countries from the South. The phenomenon of emergence in international

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2 Paraphrasing Fourcade (2013).
relations is then multi-dimensional – a product of economic, socio-political and identity elements.

A set of arguments focuses on the historical claim that the Global South should be seen very closely connected to the dynamics of the Cold War and the Bandung Conference. Conceptualizations of the Third World, as remarked by Hurrell (2013), centered on a range of state-building and development projects seeking to end poverty and vulnerability, to overcome the legacies of colonialism, and to lessen or overcome the constraints created by the international political system and by global capitalism. The Third World movement was, therefore, never simply about shared economic characteristics, but was rather a political project built on a shared experience of marginalization. Despite the fact that recent arguments intend to challenge the relevance of the idea of the Third World, the nature of emerging economies’ navigation in the world order has been shaped by their trajectory and by the developmental, societal and geopolitical context according to Hurrell (2013).

The “spirit of Bandung” was repeatedly evoked during the Durban BRICS Summit, prominently at academic fora. Despite this identity does not include the Russian presence, the South African Minister of International Relations emphasized that it is the common history that makes the group historically relevant. “This is a history that distinguishes the BRICS countries from the traditional powers. It is a history of struggle against colonialism and underdevelopment, including the spirit of Bandung »3.

Nevertheless, whilst the Cold War was of great importance for understanding the Third World, its history cannot be reduced to this period. It is the intertwining of national and imperial power, of industrialization and western economic success, and of cultural and civilizational hierarchy that sets the crucial historical background for the long-delayed ‘emergence’ of the non-western world (Hurrell, 2013). Emerging powers are then distinguished by their historic position on the margins of some notion of West. Their central foreign policies element has been the demand for status, for recognition and respect driven by a set of coalition politics. Nonetheless, poverty and inequality remain major problems of these countries. These aspects contribute to frame global issues and the interest of emerging powers in terms of North/South relations. But as it is argued by several scholars, the notions of “North” and “South” co-exist simultaneously within BRICS countries (Hurrell, 2013 ; De Lima, 2005), melding old and new ideas and policies. These countries may combine two distinct, rather contradictory, international identities (De Lima, 2005). First is labeled system-affecting state, from Keohane’s definition (1969). According to the author, these are states that cannot hope to affect the system by acting alone but can exert significant impact by working in small groups or alliances or via

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3 Ms Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, at the BRICS Academic Forum Welcome Dinner, 10 March 2013, Durban, eThekwini, KwaZulu-Natal.
universal or regional international organizations. These categories bring together countries that possess limited resources and capacities compared with major powers, but have an assertive international action, valuing multilateral arena and collective action with similar countries in order to influence international results. The second aspect is that of large emerging market, referring to large peripheral countries that implemented economic reforms of the Washington Consensus. In this sense, economic credibility and stability are elements of great value in the globalized world.

In short, the emerging countries which have gained coherence as a result of their increasing economic role in the global economy, particularly in terms of market-driven changes, assume likewise a historical identity of periphery of the Western world, faced with problems of poverty, inequality and vulnerability. These countries demand status, recognition and the means to impact the international system by working through groups or alliances and/or through multilateral institutions. BRICS’ grouping is a result of this logic having become a group of power rather than only an economic grouping, intending to influence and reform international architecture.

The coordination within the BRICS framework as well as G20 has an impact on international negotiations, aiming to counter what they perceive as an undemocratic West-dominated multilateral world (European Parliament, 2011). As synthesized by the former Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Celso Amorim, BRICS strategy is two-fold: to try to work within the United Nations, but at the same time to push for reform from the outside (Amorim, 2011). However, in spite of their parallel economic results, common domestic challenges, and some joint foreign policy strategies – particularly regarding their engagement in African continent – divergent interests and strategies can be cited as the cause of a fragile association. But a set of meetings and platforms for exchange within different sectors of the society have been pursued in order to establish and operationalize a common basis for collective action, aiming at a more functional and coherent community.

2. THE GROUPING FRAMEWORK AND DIALOGUE

Five years after the launch of the acronym, the BRICs have effectively started a process of political dialogue. In 2006, their Ministers of Foreign Affairs met within the context of the UN General Assembly, followed by other ministerial meetings on the margins of UN and G20 conferences. The BRIC format was further upgraded with stand-alone meetings of the Heads of State or Government of the four countries with a first Summit meeting being organized in Russia in 2009. Since then, five BRIC(S) Summits have taken place, which have been normally accompanied by an increasing number of diplomatic meetings at the lower levels, as well as meetings of experts, specialised ministries and agencies.

The Joint Statement of the BRIC Leaders, adopted during the first summit pointed to the two main goals of this political club: The central role played by
the G20 Summits in dealing with the financial crisis and their common willingness to support for a more democratic multi-polar world order. The claim that they were serving the common interests of emerging market economies and developing countries was further strengthened when BRIC countries decided to admit South Africa into their group (Third BRICS Summit, China, 2011). Those meetings acted as a platform of exchange and were aimed at starting a process of institutionalization and political strengthening of the group. And with the inclusion of an African country, the group could claim to not only represent a major part of the world population and of the world’s leading emerging economies, but also all the continents.

The Fifth BRICS Summit was held on March 2013 in Durban, South Africa. The meeting which brought together Presidents from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa was hosted for the first time on African soil. The leaders were invited to express their opinion around the theme “BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Development, Integration and Industrialisation”, completing the first cycle of BRICS Summits after Yekaterinburg (2009), Brasilia (2010), Sanya (2011) and New Delhi (2012). The program was ambitious in its intentions: Promotion of development and Reform of multilateral institutions. The final declaration has reaffirmed the group’s commitment with international law, multilateralism and central role of United Nations, based on an inclusive approach (eThekwini Declaration).

The declaration also fulfilled expectations in that it announced the establishment of a BRICS Development Bank, which has been considered feasible and viable by the countries’ Finance Ministers. This is considered a major step towards institutional co-operation and is aimed at mobilising resources for infrastructure and industrialisation projects in BRICS and other emerging and developing countries, with emphasis on the African continent. Leaders have also decided to constitute a financial safety net through the creation of a Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) among BRICS countries intended to anticipate short-term liquidity pressures and strengthen financial stability. However, the contingence fund, with an initial agreed size of US$ 100 billion, has not been strengthened with specific information or a timeline. Even though, these initiatives illustrate strong political effort of strengthening partnerships and challenging existing development banks and Bretton Woods institutions.

Another outcome of the Summit was the establishment of two new structures: the BRICS Think Tanks Council and the BRICS Business Council. The former was intended to link respective Think Tanks into a network to develop policy options such as the evaluation and future long-term strategy for the groups while the latter intended to bring together business associations from each country on a continuous basis. Those should be able to strengthen commercial and intellectual links between five countries. Regarding BRICS companies, the eThekwini Declaration has affirmed the importance of State-Owned Companies as well as Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises for the economy, encouraging them to explore ways of cooperation and exchange. The Business
Council has first met in August 2013 and reaffirmed its intention of serving as a counter-vailing force in the wake of global economic crisis, as well as country’s commitment to Africa in areas such as manufacturing, healthcare, agriculture and agro-processing.

The BRICS Think Tank Council has been established with the aim to enhance co-operation in research, knowledge-sharing, capacity-building and policy advice and assumes the responsibility of convening the BRICS Academic Forum. It is worth noting that with the exception of India’s Observer Research Foundation (ORF), all other institutions in the Council are directly or indirectly linked to the countries’ governments. The academic forum, also comprising institutions mostly linked to the respective governments, has revealed the differences between BRICS countries since the final declaration was not achieved without struggle. The themes of Global Economy, Reform of Multilateral Institutions, Cooperation on Africa, Education, and Peace and Security, have set discussions and recommendations. The main points of agreement among five countries were the goal of reform multilateral and financial institutions and the need to promote more interaction and understanding about each other. These are seen as first steps towards the formulation of common strategies.

Reforming the Bretton Woods institutions (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the International Finance Corporation) is considered one of the group’s priorities. The World Trade Organization (WTO) is also sideling the concerns of the emerging countries (Jayan, 2012). In the Delhi Declaration, a more representative international financial architecture has been already called for. The same subject appeared in Durban Summit in order to reflect the growing weight of BRICS and other developing countries, but with special concern about Doha Round. In this context, the support shown by BRICS and African countries to elect Brazilian diplomat, Roberto Azevêdo, as the head of the organization can be seen as a positive outcome of these coalitions and meetings. Finally, as already stated, the G20 has become an important forum for the BRICS countries to put forward stances regarding the economic North-South divide (Hirst 2012), without leaving aside the UNCTAD and the African Union, major platforms for relationship with the developing world.

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4 Joint statement of the BRICS Business Council meeting held on 19 August 2013, Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa.
5 The Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA), Brazil; the National Committee for BRICS Research (NRC/BRICS), Russia; the China Centre for Contemporary World Studies (CCCWS); and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)
6 Even though Azevedo was not the BRICS’ candidate in the beginning of the process.
3. BRICS AND AFRICA: TOWARDS A PLATFORM FOR ACTION?

The interest in increasing BRICS’ engagement with non-BRICS countries and international/regional organisations was envisioned in the Sanya Declaration and reaffirmed in the eThekwini text. A Dialog with African leaders was held after the Summit, under the theme “Unlocking Africa’s potential: BRICS and Africa Cooperation on Infrastructure”, intending to strengthen co-operation with African continent. Invited participants included BRICS presidents, the Chairperson of the African Union, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, African Leaders representing the eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs), as well as the NEPAD Presidential Infrastructure Championing Initiative (PICI). The promotion of African regional integration was the overall objective of the Retreat, aspect emphasized during the Academic Forum and the Summit of the Heads of State.

The key to this co-operation is infrastructure development within the framework of the AU and NEPAD. BRICS’ support to these organisations has already been witnessed in Sanya and New Delhi Declarations, with the same emphasis on infrastructure. In New Delhi, BRICS leaders included comments on knowledge exchange, access to technology and capacity-building. But the Durban summit set a path to forge implementation of projects under the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), the AU NEPAD Africa Action Plan (2010-2015), the AU/NEPAD Presidential Infrastructure Championing Initiative (PICI) and the Regional Infrastructure Development Master Plans. In this regard, it was convened that South Africa could act as the channel to the rest of the continent, keeping African countries informed of developments regarding BRICS and their co-operation policies through the AU Assembly.

Therefore, BRICS engagement with Africa has been focused on the recognition of the African Union and NEPAD. And the BRICS Development Bank intends to stimulate infrastructure development in the continent. The Think Thanks’ Meeting pitched the case for a BRICS-led Development Bank in order to supplement development financing and concessional lending towards key structures with funding gaps. The meeting proposed that such funding should also be extended to least-developed economies in order to rebalance the global economy and simultaneously enable broad-based socio-economic transformation in the global South (Saran et al., 2013). In this context, the BRICS Bank, if truly implemented, could have a major role in shaping infrastructure and industrial development of the African continent.

However, it seems that the focus of this agenda is primarily the reform of international financial institutions rather than the co-ordination or the definition of a common paradigm of Development Co-operation of the BRICS towards the developing world. At least on what consist the International Co-operation Systems as implemented by the OECD. All five member countries stress their commitment to the principles of the South-South Cooperation,
relying on the notions of “partnership” for development and mutual benefits instead of “donations” and political conditionalities. The relevance of commercial exchange as a legitimate element of development (“Trade instead of Aid”), as well as support for foreign direct investment have also been considered shared goals, particularly regarding Infrastructure development (“financial co-operation”). The member countries have also prioritized sharing the experience of public policies with low-income countries in several sectors, from Health to Agriculture. Despite these commendable goals and the circumstantial convergence during the Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (November, 2011), it is hard to identify a common plan for action by BRICS in the regard of Development Co-operation as considered by the OECD.

BRICS figured prominently during the debates in South Korea, particularly in the recognition of South-South Cooperation (SSC) practices as a relevant feature of International Development Co-operation. In this sense, the major outcome of the Busan Forum was the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, including both North-South and South-South Co-operation. Originally planned to review the implementation of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the focus shifted to whether and on what terms the world’s emerging powers would agree to be included (Eyben & Savage, 2013, 17. Paragraph 2 of Busan Declaration traced a border across time:

« The nature, modalities and responsibilities that apply to South South Co-operation differ from those that apply to North South Co-operation. At the same time, we recognise that we are all part of a development agenda in which we participate on the basis of common goals and shared principles. In this context, we encourage increased efforts to support effective co-operation based on our specific country situations. The principles, commitments and actions agreed in the outcome document in Busan shall be the reference for South South partners on a voluntary basis. »

Russia, for instance, sent a fairly low-level delegation to Busan, clearly distancing itself from the emerging countries on development co-operation. Russia’s self-image simultaneously includes (it defines itself as a BRIC) and excludes itself in an imagined geography of emerging powers. So far, little progress has been made in fully involving the emerging powers in the negotiations: « they haven’t rejected Busan but haven’t embraced it either » (Eyben & Savage, 2013, 467).

According to Eyben and Savage (2013), emerging powers are more interested in the G20 than the Busan partnership as a forum for discussion about development. Apparently, BRICS countries do not intend to integrate or reform Aid established agenda and institutions (represented by the CAD/OECD and Paris and Accra Declarations) as they do not recognize this forum as inclusive or legitimate. Besides, they do not act together on this agenda, despite promoting some similar principles of SSC. In their relationship
with African continent, the only common concerns presented in eThekwini Declaration in terms of Development Co-operation was the interface with African Union and NEPAD and the commitment with the continent’s integration. This is not exactly the case of the IBSA Forum, which has already established the IBSA Trust Fund and a mechanism called Alleviation of Poverty and Hunger funding small and middle scale development projects.

4. THE WAY FORWARD FOR THE EMERGING CLUB

Numerous intercontinental co-operation agreements as well as the creation of strategic groupings among emerging countries represent a heterogeneous diplomatic activism of the South. As pointed out earlier, their objective is to contest the excessive weight of major powers in international institutional architecture. This is the case of IBSA and BRICS (Soule-Kohndou, 2013). Although communities of interest proliferate, the foundation of the emerging clubs are fragile and face strong rivalries among them, for instance between China and India that dispute for leadership. Criticism regarding the coherence of the group has been in the works for a while now: During the 2011 BRICS Summit, the former Indian Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran, suggested that there was “no doubt that the BRICS together represent a potentially significant political and economic force on the international stage. (...) However, the BRICS have spelt out common concerns rather than an agenda of common action. This is not surprising given the diversity of the group” (Devraj, 2011).

A report of the European Parliament argued that the intensification of relations between the BRICS and the achievement of some success should not mask the fact that the BRICS countries constitute a “political club”, but to not systematically form a bloc. The report is based on the position of these countries in the United Nations until 2011 (European Parliament, 2011). Compared to the assessment of the overall association in the General Assembly, BRICS cohesion seemed even more limited with regard to resolutions related to disarmament and international security. The highest degree of cohesion has been found in the IBSA format, which also reflects different nature of these three countries in comparison with China and Russia. BRICS nations are profoundly different and these differences have been recognized in the grouping’s summits and forums, before the attempt of building upon the convergences. In spite of the construction of a common identity and the formulation of common concerns, economic and political relations within the BRICS are irregular. These countries represent diverse political systems. For instance, despite having democratic systems, Brazil, India and South Africa still show a lot of differences. They are at varying levels of economic development: China’s growth rate in 2010 (10,4%) stands at 3 times that of South Africa’s in the same year (2,9%). In the same context, India’s
growth (9.6%) is faster than that of Brazil’s (7.5%)\(^7\). Further, their wealth in resources and demographic trends also differs. In terms of intra-group trading, China is strongly relevant whereas other countries show limited commercial exchange among each other. Chinese companies, specifically those operating in mining, gold and telecommunications, are important competitors to their South African counterparts (Lafargue, 2009).

Russia and China are more established powers, given their seats in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Russia is indeed the most atypical actor within the group, not exactly corresponding to an emerging country but to an ancient superpower desiring to reconstitute part of its lost political status. Although the country counts on its membership in the Security Council as one of its major assets, it is much weaker in terms demographics and economic trends (Laïdi, 2011).

However, BRICS countries have several features in common which bring them closer to each other. They possess a range of economic, military and political power resources and some capacity to contribute to the production of regional or global order; they intend to gain a more influential role in world politics and they are outside or on the margin of the US-led set of international and multilateral structures (European Parliament, 2011). Moreover, BRICS members will roughly continue to contribute to the world’s growing middle class. They are due to work in an *ad hoc*, practical and incremental manner. Hence, what is the place for a long-term vision in the recent reality of the grouping?\(^8\)

Institutional flexibility is recognized as central to the very idea of BRICS, according to the scholars’ Council. In this sense, nodal research organisations and think tanks could act in strengthening a continuous engagement (Saran et al., 2013). This includes the establishment of institutions able to contribute to experience and knowledge exchange, the creation of data bases and combined formation programmes, and the creation of communication channels and platforms for academics, scientists, analysts and civil societies. Academics assembled in Durban considered the establishment of a virtual Secretariat as crucial to coordinate and extend the reach of a programme of action to be achieved collectively. The BRICS Summit highlighted member States aim at the gradual transformation of the bloc from a non-formal annual meeting and an instrument to co-ordinate positions on a limited number of issues into a full-scale mechanism for interaction on key issues of world politics and economy. Therefore, they do not intend to artificially spur the expansion and institutionalization process, rather provide a solid operational foundation to the strategic interaction. At the same time, mechanisms of policy formulation are proposed to be dynamic and inclusive.

In other words, extremely heterogeneous countries in terms of visions, interests, domestic characteristics and international position, envisage

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strengthening themselves as bloc of power by deepening and operationalizing on-going exchanges. This competitive group is then encouraged by the common objective to reform the international system towards greater participation from these emerging powers. Multilateral institutions are considered major place of BRICS affirmation and legitimization. The WTO is an existing framework within which BRICS has already collectively positioned itself by fostering an intra-BRICS consensus.

The UNSC reform is an important factor if the group’s agenda for participation. However, this could be an aspect of disagreement within the bloc. Brazil, India and South Africa express their determination in taking a permanent seat within the Council, which is not the case with China and Russia and other developing countries. These differences create sub-groups. On the other hand, IBSA countries assume that linking selective common interests and making the group more operational create a mechanism that becomes functional (in terms of political co-ordination and reinforcement of economic relations) (Soule-Kohndou, 2013). IBSA countries have also been more articulate about their relationship with Africa.

Functionalists emphasize the positive contributions made a given social arrangement (e.g., institutions, cultural values, norms, and so forth) to the current operation and continued reproduction of society and its cultural pattern. In the International Relations field, Functionalists assert that international economic and social cooperation is a prerequisite for political cooperation. In the last several decades new efforts have been made to revive functionalism by a new wave of “neofunctionalists” such as Jeffrey Alexander, Niklas Luhmann, Jürgen Habermas (Nielsen, 2007). Joseph S. Nye pointed out that the common aspect of these studies was a focus on the ways in which increased transactions and contacts changed attitudes and transnational coalition opportunities, and the ways in which institutions helped to foster such interaction. The problem was its focus on the European integration (Jayan, 2012).

In the case of BRICS, some authors (Hirst, 2012) highlight that it is more plausible to consider them a motor of multipolarization in the international community than IBSA. While the latter conceals more political coherence the former adds major powers like China and Russia upon the configuration of the international system. Moreover, commercial interests within this group are higher due to Chinese importance on countries’ (such as Brazil’s and South Africa’s) trade agenda. In this regard, both maintain their purpose. But BRICS remains a non-institutionalized grouping whose long-term strengthening rests on the accomplishment of an envisioned ability to foster higher interaction and a more operational framework.

**CONCLUSION**

BRICS is a platform for dialogue and co-operation amongst countries that represent important share of world’s population, GPD and markets. As we
have seen, it is a nascent, informal political diplomatic club of emerging States with the aim of reforming multilateral and financial international institutions, under an evolving and flexible agenda. The transcontinental dimension of its interaction adds to its significance. Relying both on the symbolic and historical discourse of the South and on their increasingly economic – market-driven – weight, they question the leadership of world order.

The intertwining of western economic success, historical mobilisation for recognition and remaining problems of poverty and inequality meld together notions of North and South within same countries. Multilateral institutions and arenas such as the G20 have been identified as important space of policy for this grouping of power, not exactly a coherent bloc according to some perspectives. Despite their recent efforts and aforementioned commonalities as well as their shared interest on African continent, BRICS is still an uneven, heterogeneous and competing grouping that prefers the flexibility rather than superficial institutionalization. On the other hand, the organization of a set of platforms for exchange within different sectors of the society could make it more functional and operationalize a common basis of collective action.

The 5th BRICS Summit looked at the group’s relation with Africa: a political relation legitimating the NEPAD and the African Union aimed at the strengthening of the continent’s integration and a first statement of intentions regarding a concrete shift within financial international architecture. The BRICS Bank, if this definitely gets on the track, will hardly defy World Bank hegemony, but it would represent a complementary and alternative option for the emerging and developing world, particularly African countries. Nevertheless, their commercial relations and development co-operation with the continent remains independent, despite some shared principles of SSC. Apparently, they do not intend to reform established framework of Aid to put their “horizontal co-operation” forward.

The head of Russian delegation in the academic meeting succeeded in synthetizing the group’s aspirations: he said « BRICS is now a reality, not a virtuality. We become more and more real ». In this sense, some relevant common interests and increased transactions and contacts contribute to the strengthening of such a fragile community that preaches for the autonomy of each country.

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