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## The 5<sup>th</sup> BRICS Academic Forum: Towards a Long Term Vision and Partnership with Africa?



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The rise of a group of emerging economies is one of the most striking phenomena in recent economic history. The creation of “diplomatic clubs”<sup>i</sup> among States such as BRICS, characterize current evolutions in the political arena. This group constitutes a forum of industrialised, large and fast-growing economies with significant influence on regional and global matters. They have assumed a proactive presence in several multilateral contexts aiming at promoting normative and operational changes<sup>ii</sup>. This effort has been primarily generated at their annual summit for the Heads of State.

The term BRICs was coined by the Chief Economist of Goldman Sachs in 2001, in a paper titled “Building Better Global Economic BRICs” and at the time it included Brazil, Russia, India and China. South Africa joined the group only in 2011. 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. It is considered a multi-dimensional phenomenon, the product of economic, socio-political and identity elements<sup>iii</sup>. The grouping's pattern of resilience would have legitimated a posteriori their conceptual coherence<sup>iv</sup>.

The Fifth BRICS Summit was held on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2013 in Durban, South Africa. The Summit

which brought together the heads of the emerging States of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, took place for the first time on African soil. The leaders expressed their opinion on the theme of “BRICS and Africa – Partnership for Development, Integration and Industrialisation”. The objectives on the agenda were ambitious: promoting development and reforming multilateral institutions. The eThekweni Declaration reaffirmed the group's commitment to promoting international law and multilateralism, as well as global stability, development and co-operation, based on an inclusive approach. The Summit brought together the leaders of countries that, together, 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<sup>v</sup>.

One of the main discussions during the Summit concerned the formal launch of the negotiations for the creation of a development bank, in order to finance infrastructures and industrialisation in BRICS and other developing countries, particularly on the African continent. This bank would serve as a financial institution aligned with the way emerging countries view development, but not really as a counterweight to the World Bank and the IMF. Leaders also decided to constitute a financial safety net by creating a

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Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) among BRICS countries, intended to anticipate short-term liquidity pressures and strengthen financial stability. This contingency fund, with an initial size of 100 billion USD, as agreed by the member States, was not elaborated further. Moreover, they signed co-operation agreements, including the Multilateral Agreement on Co-operation and Co-financing for Sustainable Development and the Multilateral Agreement on Infrastructure Co-Financing for Africa.

The new Chinese President, Mr Xi Jinping, took part in the BRICS Summit which was his first major multilateral meeting, and which marked the beginning of a long African tour. Other African countries were also present, especially during the Dialogue between the leaders of the BRICS and African countries on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March. Among the Dialogue guests were the Presidents of the African Union (AU), the AU Commission and NEPAD, as well as various leaders representing regional economic communities. The Dialogue helped to open discussions between the BRICS members and other developing States and regional organisations. These discussions were preceded by business and academic forums able to create conditions for co-operation and business, according to Brazilian diplomacy. Concrete results stemmed from these discussions, such as the creation of the BRICS Think Tanks Council and the BRICS Business Council. The forums, with the academic one in particular, aimed at formulating recommendations and a long term vision for the Summit of the Heads of States and Governments.

### What Do the Academics Have to Say?

The BRICS Academic Forum hosted by the Durban University of Technology (DUT), the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the Department of International Relations and Co-operation (DIRCO), and Higher Education South Africa (HESA), contemplated increasing interactions in the research circles and formulating recommendations to be presented to the leaders during the Summit of 26-27 March 2013. Most participants were grouped into think tanks linked to

the governments of the five countries and involved in formulating public policies. A smaller number of civil society organisations and other research institutions integrated the non-official delegations of these countries. The forum benefitted also from the presence of the South African Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Mrs Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, and Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande.

The debates were organised into plenary sessions followed by parallel discussions on five themes: the role of the BRICS in the Global Economy, the Reform of Institutions of Global Governance, Co-operation in Africa, Education, Research and Skills Development for Building Industrialising Economies as well as the Peace and Security theme. The final declaration – read by Chairman Dr Siphamandla Zondi, Director of the Institute for Global Dialogue, and signed by the heads of each delegation – was not finalised without difficulty, testifying to the differences in perspectives of the attending delegations. The declaration confirms the fact that the forum materialised the aspirations of countries wanting to consolidate partnerships with one another, but also with emerging markets and developing countries, so as to reinforce development trajectories and promote integration and industrialisation. The recommendations also representing the adopted themes include:

#### 1 - BRICS and Global Economy:

The BRICS should facilitate better co-operation in the trade field, particularly goods and services. They should undertake discussions on the feasibility of setting up privileged commercial agreements among themselves, as well as reinforcing financial and development co-operation by establishing a BRICS development bank, and by creating mechanisms to manage the volatility of the global money market.

#### 2 - Reform of Global Governance Institutions:

The objectives of the group are to reform global multilateral institutions by making them more democratic, representative and accountable. As such, the BRICS should endeavour to make their voices heard and to promote the representation of emerging

economies and developing countries in multilateral forums. The BRICS should actively explore innovative and complementary partnerships for an equitable and sustainable development. The creation of a parliamentary forum could intensify political interaction.



use their relative power in post-conflict situations, under the aegis of the United Nations. However, participants did not mention once issues concerning for example the situation in Syria.

Concretely, the meeting of the Think Tanks, which was held on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2013, decided to establish a BRICS Think

### 3 – Co-Operation with Africa:

The BRICS should acknowledge the value of diversity and experience found in the separate and joint histories of their own countries and those of African countries. This should include looking for deep co-operation with the African Union and taking into account African priorities, with regional integration in particular.

### 4 – Training, Carrying out Research and Developing Skills to Elaborate Industrialised Economies:

The BRICS should intensify their support to academic collaboration. This includes enhancing the status of local languages and cultural practices. The BRICS should consider creating an independent agency to rate schools and universities in their countries. Moreover, the Forum proposes the establishment of a primary data bank on the five countries, as well as a digital platform including detailed information on the researchers and institutions working on BRICS-related issues.

### 5 – Peace and Security:

The BRICS should continue to promote the importance of the United Nations, and be more active in promoting peaceful solutions in the case of conflicts. Shared safety preoccupations such as water, diet, the environment, health and preparedness to disasters must continue to be a focal point. The BRICS should also promote the peaceful use of space and

Tanks Council with the intention of enhancing co-operation in research, knowledge-sharing, capacity-building and policy advice. This Council, made up of institutions leading the delegations, will be in charge of organising the next academic forums. All additional co-operation functions and methods will be elaborated during a meeting held in October 2013. However, it must be pointed out that, except for the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) in India, all the institutions making up this Council are directly or indirectly linked to the governments of the BRICS: the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA, Brazil); the National Committee for BRICS Research (BRICS/NRC, Russia); the Chinese Centre for Contemporary World Studies (CCCWS, China) and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC, South Africa).

More of a club than a forum, the main points of agreement among the delegations of the five countries concerned the objective for the reform of multilateral and financial institutions, and the importance of promoting more interaction and increasing knowledge between countries. Indeed, sharing information more efficiently within the group is perceived as a first step towards formulating common strategies. Reforming the Bretton Woods institutions (the World Bank, the IMF, and the IFC) is considered one of the group's priorities. The World Trade Organization (WTO) is also sidelining the

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concerns of the emerging countries<sup>vi</sup>. In the Delhi Declaration, a more representative international financial architecture has been already called for. In this context, the support shown by BRICS and African countries to elect Brazilian diplomat Roberto Azevêdo as the head of the organisation, can be seen as a positive outcome of such coalitions and meetings.

Finally, the relationship of the BRICS with Africa, which is a wide source of media coverage and divergence of opinions in terms of their contribution to the continent's ongoing economic and social transformation, raises many questions that will be pointed out in what follows.

## The BRICS and Africa

### Setting the Debate

The shared interest in increasing commitment and co-operation with other emerging and developing countries, as well as with international and regional organisations, was envisioned in the Sanya Declaration (2012) and has been evoked during all the meetings, including during the Summit of the Heads of States and Governments<sup>vii</sup>. Organising the Dialogue between African and BRICS leaders on the theme of “Unlocking Africa's Potential: BRICS and Africa Co-operation on Infrastructure” reinforced this discourse. On that occasion, Chinese President Xi Jinping affirmed that the global governance system would weaken without the participation of Africa.

The media compared these meeting declarations and initiatives with the “African Rush”, when Europeans colonised the continent at the end of the 19th century<sup>viii</sup>. Grabbing raw materials and lands were part of the questions which were frequently asked during the coverage of the Durban Summit<sup>ix</sup>. However, there is little misunderstanding on the possible neo-colonial relation with the African continent, considering the economic context with the high prices of raw materials and an African market in full expansion<sup>x</sup>.

The Chinese presence is that which is most

controversial, in the media in particular: Chinese co-operation and China's investment practices in Africa are not considered by certain authors and leaders as being in accordance with international standards on transparency and good governance<sup>xi</sup>. This led the representative of the think tank China Centre for Contemporary World Studies to feel that a sort of “sinophobia” had been developing over the years. Nonetheless, these issues were only superficially dealt with during the academic Forum. Other issues such as the adopted development models were not tackled either.

The plenary and parallel sessions were limited to one presentation of the main lines of action of each country concerning their co-operation with Africa, highlighting aspects shared among them, such as historical relations and horizontal co-operation, although not necessarily joint BRICS lines of actions towards Africa. Differences were brought forward during a provocative intervention read by a representative of the Brazilian delegation who was questioning the sudden interest of the BRICS for Africa. However, neither the stakes nor the criticisms of this relation were examined in more detail. In fact, they were suppressed by political declarations according to which criticisms against the BRICS as a group could not appreciate the importance of multipolarity for the successful geopolitical functioning of the international system.

Concerning BRICS co-operation with African countries, the grouping does not have an African policy yet. In this sense, the main point of agreement between the delegations concerned the fact that viewing Africa as a continent was a priority, always taking into account the continent's diversity of opinions and characteristics. As such, the idea was to support the regional integration process, particularly through the African Union. As a result, the latter is considered as one of the most important BRICS interlocutors on the African continent.

### Common Interests of a Heterogeneous Group

The academic delegations and the delegations of the

Heads of the BRICS States agreed to support, within the framework of NEPAD, the industrialisation of African countries by promoting investments, knowledge sharing, capacity building and import diversification. The academic delegations also suggested promoting the development of infrastructures in Africa, with mutual benefits for the BRICS and African countries, through preferential financial arrangements in particular. By prioritising infrastructures, endeavours already carried out by the African Union were recognised, for example in the case of the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), NEPAD's Action Plan (2010-2015), NEPAD's Presidential Infrastructure Champion Initiative (PICI), as well as the Regional Infrastructure Development Master Plans<sup>xii</sup>. The possible creation of a BRICS bank will play an important role in this case, supplementing financing and concessional lending towards key infrastructures with funding gaps<sup>xiii</sup>. The role of the African Union has also been recognised in the peace and regional security fields. This focus on the NEPAD agenda has also been the result of efforts by South Africa in placing herself as a sort of intermediary between the BRICS and the African continent.

It seems that this agenda is primarily focused on the reform of international financial institutions, rather than on the definition of a common paradigm of Development Co-operation of the BRICS towards the African continent. Despite circumstantial agreements during the meeting of Busan on support efficiency (November 2011), we cannot find a joint action of the BRICS in this domain. The Global Partnership for

Effective Development Co-operation – including both North-South and South-South co-operation – was considered as the major outcome of that Forum. But so far, little progress has been made in fully involving the emerging powers in the negotiations, the BRICS being apparently more interested in the G20 as a forum for discussion about development<sup>xiv</sup> + <sup>xv</sup>. Nonetheless, the five emerging countries promote a similar set of points related to this agenda:



Photo: GCIS

- The principles of a South-South co-operation defending the notions of “partnerships” for developing and learning instead of “donating”; mutual benefits to the detriment of political conditionality.
- The importance of trade and foreign direct investments as a legitimate element of development.
- Sharing experiences in public policies with low income countries in various fields, from health to agriculture.

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The political discourse held at the conference endeavoured to justify this gathering of the BRICS which, according to Minister Nkoana-Mashabane, forms a bloc with a shared history as far as fighting against colonisation and underdevelopment is concerned, according to the “spirit of Bandung”<sup>xvi</sup>; a bloc of shared challenges against inequality, poverty and unemployment; a bloc led by specific interests and working for a real partnership with Africa<sup>xvii</sup>. The spirit of Bandung was evoked several times in the speeches during the various Forum interventions, even though this identity should not include Russia.

The Bandung argument presents the group as being the product of the Cold War and with the political idea peculiar to situations of underdevelopment: development projects attempting above all to end poverty, precariousness and vulnerability, to overcome the legacy of colonialism, to loosen or break up the constraints imposed by the international political system, its institutions and, more still, global capitalism. However, according to Andrew Hurrell<sup>xviii</sup>, the history of the group does not amount to that of the Cold War. The notion of South remains useful in order to grasp the specificity of identities (as diverse as they are) in large emerging countries which navigate and position themselves within the capitalist order as is – liberal and at the same time structured by the State – while accepting the main part of the premises and values of this world order. “North” and “South” coexist on the territory of emerging countries, and the recombination of ideas as well as old and new public policies prevents these countries from letting themselves being absorbed purely and simply in an extended version of the great liberal West.

### What Long Term Vision?

Despite the definition of shared identity and the formulation of a few common objectives, economic and political relationships among the BRICS are discontinuous. For example, apart from the fact that China trades a lot with the countries of this bloc, the other countries carry out very little trade among themselves. They trade more with Africa than among

themselves. Chinese companies, particularly as regards mining and gold extraction and in the telecommunications sector, are fierce competitors for the South Africans<sup>xix</sup>. Russia, within the BRICS, is the most atypical actor, seeing that it is not an emerging country per se, but a former superpower wishing to regain part of its lost political status. Russia sees in her status of permanent member of the Security Council one of her main advantages, while on the economic and demographic level, her position remains weaker<sup>xx</sup>.

These countries have differing visions as far as the role of the group in the international system is concerned. Moreover, the BRICS members are confronted with important challenges, in their own countries, as regards social inequality, economic slowdown, political issues and environmental problems<sup>xxi</sup>. Also, the idea behind the long term vision of the think tanks is that, despite differences among the members of the group, any priority defined jointly will be followed more naturally if the BRICS set up a coherent and sustainable framework of continuous commitment. At the same time, political formulation mechanisms should be dynamic and inclusive, with institutional flexibility being the central idea of the BRICS. In this context, the role of pivotal research institutions and think tanks is perceived as being crucial.

The importance of transforming the BRICS into a formal mechanism of strategic interaction, should not as such force an artificial expansion and institutionalisation process. For some of the academics, establishing a solid functional base for associating its members should be a priority. This includes experience and knowledge sharing institutions, the establishment of data banks and joint training programmes, and the creation of new communication channels as well as academic and civil society platforms. In other words, extremely heterogeneous countries in terms of vision, interest, internal characteristics and international insertion, forming a bloc of power, seek to form themselves into a group by increasing exchanges. As such, this gathering of very often competing powers is

nourished by the objective of reforming the international system which aims at ensuring their increased participation.

## Conclusion

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.

Within the framework of its interaction with Africa, this bloc of power is beginning to yield results, the most recent being the election of Brazilian national Roberto Azevêdo as the head of the World Trade Organisation (even though Azevêdo was not the candidate of the bloc at the beginning of the

negotiations). Yet, unlike IBSA which represents a slightly more homogeneous group, and which was already able to implement a greater number of concrete initiatives, the BRICS somewhat agree on a few guidelines for South-South co-operation and for contributing to the African regional integration process. Besides, it adds major powers like China and Russia upon the configuration of the international system. This could be moved forward by implementing the development bank project, which is considered a means of advancing BRICS institutionalisation under a functional logic, although the negotiation process is on-going and vague. For the moment, efforts are focused on increasing interactions and knowledge on the different countries making up the BRICS. The Academic Forum initiated its closing session with a declaration of the head of the Russian delegation, Dr Vyacheslav Nikonov, who summarised the status of the group: "BRICS is now a reality, not a virtuality. We become more and more real". The political and economic co-ordination prospects are under construction and, to date, advocate the flexibility and autonomy of each country, advancing only the issues under a functional basis and on which there is agreement.

- <sup>i</sup> Soule-Kohndou, F. 2013. Le rôle des Forums IBAS et BRICS dans la diplomatie d'émergent de l'Inde. 12ème Congrès Association Française de Sciences Politiques. 9 Juillet 2013. Paris.
- <sup>ii</sup> Hirst, M. 2012. Emerging powers and global governance. <http://www.udesa.edu.ar/files/UAHUMANIDADES/EVENTOS/PAPERHIRST11112.PDF>. Accessed 01/06/2013
- <sup>iii</sup> Soule-Kohndou, F. 2013. Le rôle des Forums IBAS et BRICS dans la diplomatie d'émergent de l'Inde. 12ème Congrès Association Française de Sciences Politiques. 9 Juillet 2013. Paris.
- <sup>iv</sup> Fourcade, M., 2013. The material and symbolic construction of the BRICs: Reflections inspired by the RIPE Special Issue. *Review of International Political Economy* 20, 256–267.
- <sup>v</sup> BRICS, 2012, The BRICS Report: a study of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa with special focus on synergies and complementarities, OUP India, 21 June 2012.
- <sup>vi</sup> Jayan, P.A., 2013. BRICS: Advancing Cooperation and Strengthening Regionalism. *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 68, 363–384.
- <sup>vii</sup> eThinwinki Declaration, <http://www.brics5.co.za/fifth-brics-summit-declaration-and-action-plan/>, 20/05/2013
- <sup>viii</sup> RFI, 2013, Sommet des BRICS: une nouvelle «ruée vers l'Afrique»? , <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20130327-afrique-sud-brics-vers-une-nouvelle-ruée-vers-afrique-bresil-inde-chine-russie>, 20/05/2013
- <sup>ix</sup> Le Monde, 2013, "Chinafrrique", les questions qui dérangent, <http://www.lemonde.fr/asie>

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- [pacifique/article/2013/03/29/chinafrrique-les-questions-qui-derangent\\_3150304\\_3216.html](http://www.safpi.org/news/article/2013/03/29/chinafrrique-les-questions-qui-derangent_3150304_3216.html), 20/05/2013
- x Boillot Jean-Joseph, « La montée de la « Chindiafrrique » et le pionnier du développement A. O. Hirschman », *Revue Tiers Monde*, 2011/4 n°208, p. 121-138. DOI : 10.3917/rtm.208.0121
- xi Lafargue François, « L'Afrique du Sud et la Chine » Un mariage de raison ?, *Afrique contemporaine*, 2012/2 n° 242, p. 11-28
- xii See on this subject the article by Agathe Maupin in this same issue.
- xiii See insert.
- xiv Eyben, R., Savage, L., 2013. Emerging and Submerging Powers: Imagined Geographies in the New Development Partnership at the Busan Fourth High Level Forum. *Journal of Development Studies* 49, 457–469.
- xv In the case of the IBSA Forum, more concrete mechanisms have already been implemented, such as the IBSA Trust Fund and the Project Alleviation of Poverty and Hunger.
- xvi It makes reference to the conference held in the city of the same name in 1955 that constituted the origin of the Third World movement (Non-aligned). This was never simply about shared economic characteristics, but was rather a political project built on a shared experience of marginalization.
- xvii SAFPI, 2013, BRICS Academic Forum: speech by SA Foreign Minister, <http://www.safpi.org/news/article/2013/brics-academic-forum-speech-sa-foreign-minister>, 20/05/2013
- xviii Hurrel, 2012, Récits d'émergence : la fin du Tiers Monde ?, *Critique internationale* 2012/3 (N° 56)
- xix Lafargue François, « L'Afrique du Sud et la Chine » Un mariage de raison ?, *Afrique contemporaine*, 2012/2 n° 242, p. 11-28.
- xx Laïdi Zaki, « Les BRICS : un cartel d'ambitions souverainistes », *Le Débat*, 2011/5 n° 167, p. 50-59.
- xxi Vieira de Jesus, 2013, Os principais pontos na agenda da Cúpula de Durban, BRICS Policy Center, <http://www.bricspolicycenter.org/homolog/arquivos/Cupuladedurban.pdf>, 20/05/2013