

Introduction by the editors [of the special edition on the BRICS]

The BRICS group of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, which was hosted by Russia for its first meeting of BRIC members at Yekaterinburg on 16 June 2009, has evolved into a plurilateral summit institution recognized both by former sceptics and proponents as a major participant in the international system. Ever since, the BRIC has grown institutionally, developed into the BRICS with the inclusion of South Africa, expanded its agenda and the intensity of interaction among its members, and demonstrated its capacity to deliver on a wide range of decisions, the latest examples being the New Development Bank, the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement, the Cooperation Agreement on Innovation and the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation among BRICS Export Credit Insurance Agencies.

As the BRICS returns to Russia for its seventh summit, to be held in Ufa on 8–9 July 2015, the leaders will deliberate and make decisions on a vast number of issues across most of major global governance challenges. The BRICS remains committed to inclusive growth, macroeconomic coordination, strengthened financial stability and reform of the international institutions to better reflect the increasing weight of emerging markets and developing countries (EMDCs) in the world economy. In Fortaleza, at their sixth summit, the BRICS leaders pledged to raise economic cooperation to a qualitatively new level, and it may be expected that a strategy for economic partnership will be adopted in Ufa. Given that 2015 marks the transition to the new Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the United Nations from the Millennium Development Goals to eradicate poverty while promoting sustainable patterns of consumption and production, as well as protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development, the future of development cooperation will definitely be on the BRICS agenda. Inclusive growth depends both on the countries' economic progress and equitable social policies. The BRICS countries steadily step up their cooperation on education, health and agriculture, as well as innovation and information and communications technology to enhance opportunities for all. Peace being the cornerstone of development and growth, political and security issues will remain top priorities for BRICS cooperation.

The rapid pace of the institutionalization of the BRICS is likely to continue. The formal track has grown into a constellation of 14 cooperation formats, including meetings among sherpas and sous-sherpas, central bank governors, ministers and deputy ministers, senior officials, contact groups, and working and experts groups. The BRICS Business Forum emerged in 2010, and in 2013 the BRICS Business Council was established as a platform for a regular dialogue between the business communities and the governments of the BRICS countries. Since 2010 the Academic Forum has provided solid research to feed BRICS engagement. It provides a framework for thinkers to develop new ideas and test concepts that may then be taken up by policymakers. It also promotes wider cooperation among BRICS institutions, involving exchange programmes and joint publications. At the fifth academic forum in Durban in 2013, the BRICS Think Tanks Council (BTTC) was established to enhance cooperation in research, knowledge sharing, capacity building and policy advice among think tanks in the BRICS countries. Encouraged by the leaders' support, the BTTC has been working on a long-term vision to be presented to the leaders in 2015. In 2015 the BRICS dialogue with social partners has been expanded to include the Civil BRICS, which held a forum to bring together non-governmental organizations from the members states in June 2015. Similarly, a Trade Unions Forum is scheduled for 9 July 2015.

BRICS outreach cooperation is acquiring a regional dimension since the 2013 South African presidency initiated and successfully held the BRICS Leaders-Africa Dialogue Forum. In Fortaleza in

2014, the Brazilian presidency hosted a working session in Brasilia between the BRICS leaders and South American leaders. Holding such a dialogue between BRICS leaders and their counterparts in the host country's region is becoming a systemic component of the BRICS outreach strategy. Russia is expected to invite the leaders of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic, all members of the newly created Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) that came into force on 1 January 2015. With regard to the long-term future, Russia's BRICS partners may consider establishing free trade zones with the EEU.

This special issue of the International Organisations Research Journal (IORJ) considers the BRICS group in the system of global governance, providing an analysis of the contextual background for the group's blossoming and consolidation as an international actor and offering insights on specific BRICS policies and political perspectives. The collection starts with an overview of BRICS summitry performance, its institutionalization, the club culture and the cooperative principles. The second part looks at on different policy areas on the BRICS agenda, including finance, security and science, technology and innovation. The issue concludes with articles exploring BRICS members' interests and priorities for cooperation.

The idea of the special issue was inspired by the BRICS transformation into a global summitry institution and by the subsequent need for elaborating new and innovative theoretical frames to analyze the BRICS phenomenon in a multidisciplinary and comparative perspective. Many of the articles were first presented and discussed at the conference on "The BRICS Group in the Spotlight," convened by the University of Parma in Italy in November 2014. The authors and the editors of the collection hope that their reflections presented in the IORJ will contribute to a better understanding of the BRICS in the system of global governance and provide ideas for the forum future agenda.

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