

## CHAPTER 22

# AFTER THE EXPANSION: THE PROSPECTS OF BRICS AS THE BASIS FOR A FAIRER MULTIPOLAR WORLD ORDER

*Sergey Ryabkov talks with Sviatoslav Arov*

**Sviatoslav Arov: What can explain the popularity of BRICS among so many countries of the world? Is BRICS an epitome of a multipolar world (both in terms of relations between its members and their geographical location) in Russia's view?**

**Sergey Ryabkov:** The interest towards BRICS has been steadily growing against the backdrop of large-scale geopolitical challenges and dramatic changes taking place in the world today. The influence of BRICS countries, their successes in the economic, cultural, scientific, and technical spheres speak volumes about the potential to shape the global agenda.

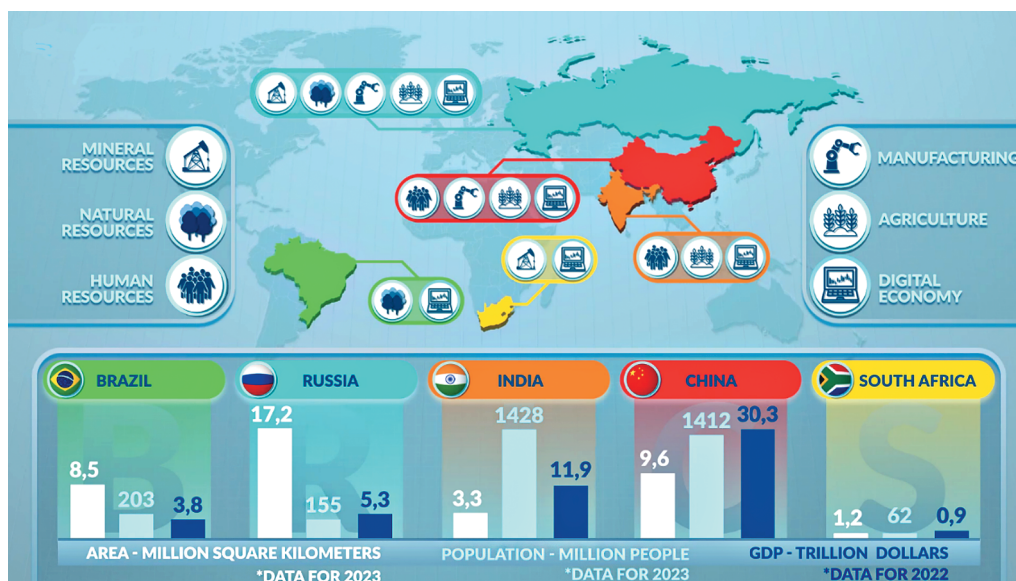
BRICS is an innovative format of interaction rather than just a union of individual states. BRICS partnership is built on mutual respect for each other's interests and a common effort to promote the realization of developing countries' aspirations on the whole. At the same time, BRICS does not oppose itself to anyone and is ready to build equal and mutually beneficial cooperation with all international actors. Such an approach, practiced by BRICS, attracts the majority of states in the world. This was clearly demonstrated by the summit held in Johannesburg on August 22-24, 2023, which was attended by the leaders of more than 60 countries of the Global South and, most notably, African countries.

Today, BRICS is seen as one of the *pillars* of a new, more equitable world order, which is designed to give all countries equal opportunities, to free the states of the Global South and Global East from the role of obedient suppliers of cheap labor and raw materials that the West imposes on them, and to consolidate the right of all nations

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**Figure 25. BRICS in Numbers (2022-2023).**

Source: Valdai Discussion Club (<https://valdaiclub.com/multimedia/infographics/videoinfographic-brics-in-2024/>)

for preserving their identity, self-determination, independent domestic and foreign policy, and protection of traditional values.

Russia and other BRICS countries fully share this stance and are in favor of an honest partnership that denies any exceptionalism. This is the reason why in the recent years more than two dozen states, including dynamically developing world centers and major regional players from all parts of the world, have declared their desire to join BRICS. In response, during the Johannesburg summit the leaders agreed to welcome Argentina<sup>1</sup>, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE into the group from January 1, 2024. Furthermore, the leaders also instructed the foreign ministers to further develop the country partner model, which should contribute to the further development of a stable BRICS circle of friends.

### **Sviatoslav Arov: What made the recent expansion of BRICS possible? Which factors did really lead to this process? Was it difficult to negotiate the issues of the enlargement?**

<sup>1</sup> In December 2023, after taking presidential office, President of Argentina Javier Milei sent official notifications to Brazilian President Lula da Silva, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Russian President Vladimir Putin, that Argentina would not join the group. – Editor's Note.

**Sergey Ryabkov:** In my response to the previous question, I have already outlined the international background in which the conditions for the expansion of BRICS were formed. But I would like to add that the invitation of new members was made possible thanks to the common BRICS founding countries' understanding of the importance of strengthening strategic partnership within the association, as well as its role and position in the international arena, including as an advocate of the interests of the Global South. Of course, the expansion would not have been possible without the reciprocal interest of the countries that applied to join BRICS. It is important that all of them support the fundamental values of BRICS, including the spirit of solidarity, equality, mutual respect, transparency, inclusiveness, mutually beneficial cooperation, and consensus, and are ready to jointly uphold the interests of the World Majority in the new expanded format.

As for the negotiation process itself, it was undoubtedly a delicate diplomatic work. As far as I can remember, no interstate association or organization has ever managed to carry out the necessary work on all the modalities of expansion and reach definite agreements in such a short period of time.

**Sviatoslav Arov: How have sanctions affected the activities of BRICS in terms of relations with Russia? Recently the New Development Bank failed to finance projects in Russia due to the obstacles created by the West. What efforts is BRICS taking to continue cooperation and to avoid these pitfalls?**

**Sergey Ryabkov:** I think it is now obvious to everyone that the illegitimate sanctions have had the opposite effect different from the one their authors hoped for. These sanctions catalyzed an active search by most members of the international community for mechanisms of interaction that would be resistant to Western sabotage.

The BRICS experience in this sense is very illustrative. Russia's trade and economic interaction with BRICS partners has only grown since the large-scale and unprecedented restrictions were imposed on our country. We are reaching record trade levels with Brazil, India, and China.

There has been a steady development of the whole range of cooperation in three key areas: politics and security, economy and finance, and humanitarian contacts. The recent examples of practical achievements in BRICS include the launch of the BRICS Vaccine Research and Development Centre in virtual format, the beginning of practical implementation of the Agreement on the Cooperation of the BRICS Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation, the approval of the BRICS Initiative on Denial of Safe Haven to Corruption, and the adoption of the BRICS Digital Economy Partnership Framework.

In 2023, under South Africa's Chairship, BRICS cooperation has been enriched with new dimensions. A decision on the establishment of the BRICS Youth Council was taken. A Joint Working Group on Sports was launched, and cultural and academic exchanges deepened. An agreement was reached to expand the BRICS Network University to include additional number of universities from BRICS countries. All this is clear evidence that BRICS cooperation is not vulnerable to external influences.

**Sviatoslav Arov: How do BRICS member states cooperate despite some differences, and will BRICS expansion lead to further contradictions? Some states still have territorial disputes, for example, but it is not a stumbling block for them to cooperate. Why the same approach cannot be implemented in the relations between Russia and the *collective West*?**

**Sergey Ryabkov:** BRICS is an innovative format of interstate cooperation bringing together different cultures and civilizations, countries with different economic and political systems and often different views on some issues on the global agenda. Our common goal is a firm commitment to pursuing an

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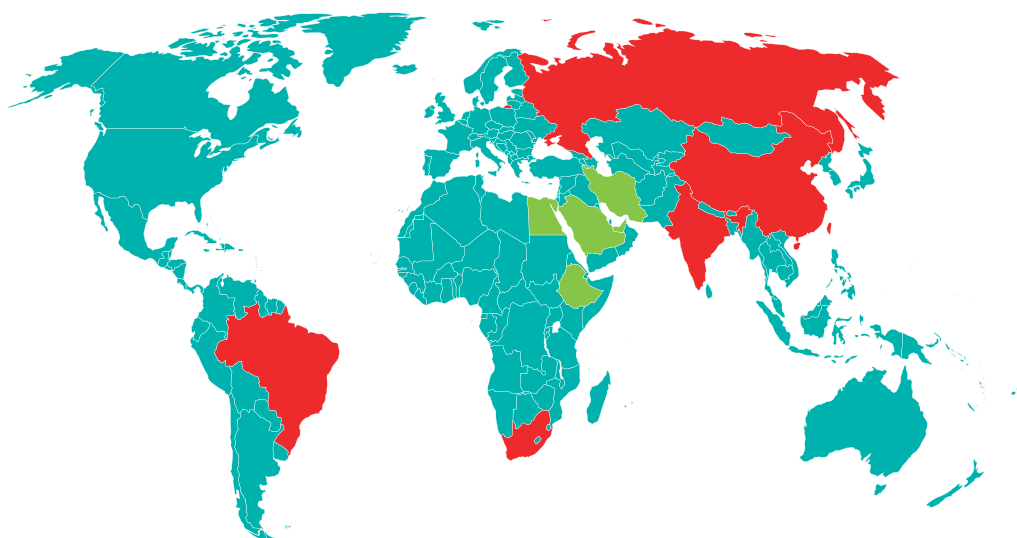
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independent domestic and foreign policy, defending sovereignty and our national interests. Over the years of cooperation within BRICS a special *culture of dialogue* has emerged, open and trustful relations have been established, based on the principles of sovereign equality, respect for the choice of individual development paths and consideration of each other's interests. This helps our countries to always find a common ground and solutions even on difficult issues. This is exactly the format that should become the basis for a fairer multipolar world order, a model of equitable interstate communication aimed at a constructive search for the responses to the challenges the world faces, without

promoting any values and external interests. The secret of the BRICS success is that it does not have any confrontational or hidden agenda. It is a union of like-minded nations which cooperate on the basis of consultations and consensus, rather than on the *master-slave* principle, where someone sets the tone and the rest follow these guidelines. I am convinced that the countries that joined BRICS on January 1, 2024<sup>2</sup> share the spirit and culture of the BRICS inter-

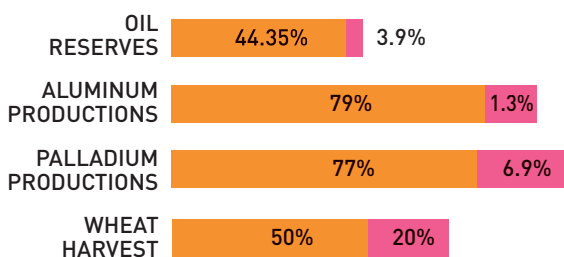
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<sup>2</sup> Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates formally joined BRICS on January 1, 2024. – Editor's Note.

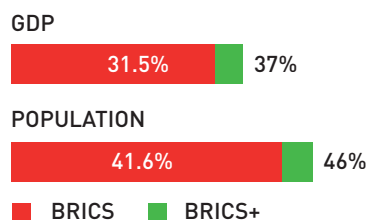


- BRICS MEMBERS (BEFORE JANUARY 1, 2024) (BRASIL, RUSSIA, INDIA, CHINA, SOUTH AFRICA)
- NEW BRICS MEMBERS (SINCE JANUARY 1, 2024) (EGYPT, ETHIOPIA, IRAN, SAUDI ARABIA, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES)

**BRICS+ and G7 (% OF GLOBAL)**



**BRICS AND ITS NEW MEMBERS (% OF WORLD)**



**Map 12. BRICS+ and G7.**

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Sources: <https://www.imf.org/en/Home>; <https://www.wto.org/>; <https://www.worldbank.org/en/home>

action, and Russia as the chair is ready to provide them with the most active assistance for successful integration into the BRICS family.

The deterioration of relations with the *collective West* was not initiated by us. The responsibility for this lies entirely with the United States and its allies. Russia has been repeatedly emphasizing that it is not cutting itself off from anyone and is ready for the closest possible cooperation, of course exclusively on an equal and mutually respectful basis, with all the states concerned in confronting the common challenges that humanity faces.

## **Sviatoslav Arov: What are Russia’s priorities for its chairship in BRICS? What are the most promising areas for cooperation between the member states? And what are the most challenging?**

**Sergey Ryabkov:** As part of Russia’s BRICS Chairship in 2024, we intend to continue developing strategic partnership on the basis of consensus and continuity, and work to enhance its role in global affairs. It is also reflected in the motto of the Russian BRICS Year: *Strengthening Multilateralism for Equitable Global Development and Security*. We are planning to hold about 200 events at various levels which will be hosted by over a dozen Russian cities.

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the states of the Global South. We will continue to cooperate on combating terrorism, money laundering, corruption, and criminal assets recovery. We will make additional efforts to jointly seek common responses to information security threats and challenges and to improve the legal framework for cooperation in this area.

There is much work to be done to comprehensively implement the BRICS Economic Partnership Strategy 2025 and the Action Plan for Innovative Cooperation for 2021-2024. An important aspect of our work will be to enhance the role of BRICS countries in the international monetary and financial system, develop interbank

cooperation, facilitate the transformation of the international settlement system, and expand the use of national currencies of the BRICS countries in their mutual trade. We will promote strengthening of the dialogue between fiscal, customs and antimonopoly authorities.

“Nevertheless, we know the course of history cannot be reversed. We are witnessing the Global Majority – the states of Eurasia, the Asia-Pacific region, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean – gain a stronger foothold in the world system. Most of these countries are increasingly asserting their national interests and identities and striving for genuine strategic independence – not in isolation, but in cooperation with other free and independent states that respect international law. In other words, their national interests are now at the forefront, as opposed to the whims of former metropolises... BRICS represents a cooperation network for regional and subregional processes

in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This cooperation network is expected to promote harmony and deepen integration within the Global Majority around the world. Our presidents and prime ministers discussed these topics during their meetings. Once again, these efforts are not designed in any way to create a new mechanism enabling the Global Majority to impose its will on others. On the contrary, in everything we do or say, in all our declarations and our actions, all of our countries emphasise that we are open to starting an honest and equal dialogue at any time... We will focus on ensuring the smooth inclusion of our new colleagues and new BRICS members in everyday activities. We will continue prioritising cooperation with countries (nearly 30 of them) that have shown an interest in a rapprochement with BRICS and are prepared to participate in our practical projects”.

**Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s Remarks  
at a BRICS Sherpa and Sous-Sherpa Meeting**

January 31, 2024

Source: Russian Foreign Ministry ([https://mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/news/1928663/](https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1928663/))

The 2023 Johannesburg Declaration documented a focus on further increase of settlements in national currencies and strengthening correspondent banking networks to support international transactions. This issue will also become one of the priorities during our chairship. Of course, it is not an easy one; it will be necessary to carefully work out the ways of practical realization of the course taken. This will be handled by relevant agencies. The need to find alternative means of cross-border settlements is obvious. Most countries have already realized that the dollar monopoly, which is weaponized by Western countries to exert pressure on other states, undermines the stability of the global financial and economic architecture, provokes new crises, and postpones the prospects of achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Our work will undoubtedly be focused on enhancing the cooperation in science, innovation, and health care. We will pay special attention to promoting contacts between academic and scientific centers, research and higher education institutions of our states and strengthening the potential of the BRICS Network University.

We also intend to promote further deepening of the dialogue in culture, sports, and youth exchanges. In particular, we plan to organize BRICS Games in June 2024. We will be happy

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to welcome athletes from BRICS countries to the International Multisport Tournament *Games of the Future* which will be held in Kazan.

BRICS Summit, scheduled for October 2024, will be the culmination of the Russian year in BRICS. We intend to continue the tradition of organizing on its sidelines the meetings with developing countries. We believe that the cooperation within the BRICS framework and its mechanisms of interaction with like-minded nations will enable the voice of the Global South to be clearly heard in the international arena, as well as to defend our national interests and the right to choose our own path of development. 🐘