



DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES
POLICY DEPARTMENT



**THE EU FOREIGN POLICY
TOWARDS THE BRICS
AND OTHER EMERGING
POWERS:
OBJECTIVES AND
STRATEGIES**

AFET



DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES OF THE UNION

DIRECTORATE B

POLICY DEPARTMENT

AD HOC STUDY

**THE EU FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE BRICS
AND OTHER EMERGING POWERS:
OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES**

Abstract

Five years after the launch of the 'BRIC' acronym, Brazil, Russia, India and China in 2006 started a process of political dialogue, with South Africa being admitted as a new member in 2011 – leading to the transformation of 'BRIC' into 'BRICS'. This study demonstrates that the BRICS countries are not acting systematically as a coherent bloc in the UN and other international forums. However, their coordination within the BRICS framework as well as within other forums such as the G20 have an impact upon international negotiations – leading to negative effects for the EU's ability to pursue its interests. This also points to the major failure of the EU's 'strategic partnerships' with the individual BRICS countries. The strategic partnership concept has been mainly important in rhetorical terms. The EU has not been able to use these partnerships to substantially upgrade its relations with the BRICS countries or to prepare itself to the shifting balance of power to the South and the Asian-Pacific region. This study presents several options for the EU to further develop the strategic partnerships and with policy recommendations to engage more actively with new and emerging powers.

This ad hoc study was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1. ASSESSMENT OF THE BRICS' FOREIGN POLICY DIMENSION	4
1.1 FROM BRICS TO BRICS: ORIGIN AND TRAJECTORY	4
1.2 VARIATIONS ON THE BRICS FORMAT AND ON 'EFFECTIVE MULTILATERALISM'	7
1.3 VOTING PATTERNS OF THE BRICS IN THE UN	10
1.4 IMPACT ON DECISION-MAKING OF NEW INTERNATIONAL FORUMS	16
1.5 PERCEPTIONS	21
2. THE IMPACT OF THE BRICS COUNTRIES' EMERGENCE ON THEIR STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE EU	23
2.1 ORIGINS AND TRAJECTORIES OF EU STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE BRICS	23
2.2 CURRENT STATE OF EU'S STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE BRICS	25
2.3 NEW ARCHITECTURE FOR EU STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE BRICS	28
3. THE CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: BEYOND EUROPEAN MYOPIA	32
GLOSSARY	36
APPENDIX	37
BIBLIOGRAPHY	38

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Five years after the launch of the BRIC-acronym Brazil, Russia, India and China started a process of political dialogue, eventually leading to an increasing number of political, diplomatic and expert meetings – including yearly summit meetings between their Heads of State – covering an increasingly wide range of policy issues. Since early 2011 the BRIC nations accepted South Africa as a new member, transforming 'BRIC' into 'BRICS'. Reflecting the major differences between the five countries, the intensification of the relations between the BRICS countries does not mean that they do systematically form a bloc. Nevertheless, the increasingly dense networks between the five countries are based on a common goal: that is to advance the G20 and other new multilateral settings as an international forum and to counter what they perceive as an undemocratic and unjust Western-dominated multilateral world. The BRICS phenomenon should therefore be seen as reflecting a general shift in the international balance of power with the centre of gravity moving from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific area and from the North to the South. This also becomes clear in the increasing dialogue in several variations on the BRICS format such as IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) and BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India and China). They all have in common that they reflect a growing tendency towards preference for non-binding commitments, which is quite different than the EU's views on 'effective multilateralism'.

How coherent are the BRICS countries? At the UN General Assembly, they cast identical votes in 56–63% of the resolutions voted upon, which also implies that on a considerable percentage of the resolutions voted upon, they do not vote as a bloc. Other variations of the BRICS format show higher scores with the highest in rank being the IBSA format. Nonetheless, a closer look at specific foreign policy issues demonstrates that engaging more with the IBSA countries is not self-evident, as they often consider respect for national sovereignty and non-intervention as more important than promotion of human rights and democracy. Important in this context is also the decline of the overall image of the EU in these countries, which indicates that it is (no more) seen as a positive normative power. When it comes to global financial, economic and environmental governance, the BRICS countries managed to effectively enhance the role of informal forums of governance, such as the G20, and to have an impact on these forums. On major issues in the G20 and in the climate change negotiations, although not acting as a bloc, they often emerge as initiators of the debate and manage to influence the outcomes. In addition to sharing some objectives, they manage to coordinate their action in order to set the agenda, shift the terms of the debate or block proposals.

Strategic partnerships have been established or planned over the past decade with all the BRICS countries as well as with other third countries. However, this proved to be mainly a rhetorical upgrade of relations, as becomes clear from an assessment of the current state of the EU's strategic partnerships in terms of institutionalization, perceived value of the relationship, security relations, and concrete progress and sticking points. The European Council of September 2010 called for an evaluation of the relations with the strategic partners, but ambiguity about the nature of these partnerships remains. Moreover, the EU has not been able to use these partnerships to substantially upgrade its relations with the BRICS countries or to prepare itself for the shifting balance of power to the South and to the Asian-Pacific region.

This study proposes four theoretical options to further develop the concept of strategic partnerships as a policy tool and to develop a new architecture for the EU's strategic partnerships with the BRICS countries – centred around the concepts 'fusing', 'focusing', 'diffusing' and 'diluting'. The last section includes policy recommendations for engaging more actively with the BRICS countries in bilateral and multilateral settings.

INTRODUCTION

The BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) are playing an increasingly significant role on the international arena both in terms of economic and political weight, the latter emanating from the spectacular growth of the former. This has the potential, and in some cases already the effect, to substantially change multilateral power balances in many international forums, such as in the UN, in climate change negotiations, or in the G8/G20. The objective of this study is to assess the nature of the rise of the BRICS countries, to evaluate the EU's strategic partnerships with these countries, and to look at the impact on the EU and the EU's foreign policy towards the BRICS and other emerging powers. This study is divided in two main parts. The first part provides an assessment of the foreign policy dimension of the BRICS (lead partner: College of Europe / K.U.Leuven, except for section 1.4, which was written by FIIA). The second part analyses the impact of the emergence of the new global actors on the objectives of EU strategic partnerships (lead partner: FIIA).

The **first part** of this study provides an assessment of **the foreign policy dimension of the BRICS**, of the nature of the BRICS phenomenon, and of the behaviour of the BRICS in international forums. Its first section prepares the ground for the remainder of this study: it provides an overview of the evolution of the 'BRICs', from an acronym launched in 2001 by Goldman Sachs to a reality which is reflected in the growing interaction between the four BRIC (since 2008) and five BRICS countries (since 2011). It points to the gradually increasing number of meetings (and widening scope of issues covered in these meetings) and provides some basic statistics, as well as an initial overview of the main similarities and differences between the five countries. Section 1.2 situates the BRICS within the context of a growing number of emerging regional powers and of a multitude of partially overlapping and complementary multilateral organisations and cooperation schemes in the Asian-Pacific area and the South in general – including variations on the BRICS theme (BRIC, RIC, IBSA, BASIC). It also points to the potential and actual implications of these increasingly active networks on the international position of the EU and on 'effective multilateralism'. The objective of Section 1.3 is to answer the questions related to the voting patterns of the BRICS in the UN. This section is based mainly on a quantitative methodology, including new statistical material on the voting cohesion of the BRICS in the UN General Assembly and its Main Committees. Section 1.4 assesses the impact of the BRICS on the decision-making processes of new international forums and particularly the G20, as well as the implications for the EU. It focuses on four issues which have been particularly visible on the BRICS countries' G20 agenda: reform of the Bretton Woods institutions, cross-border capital flows, the international reserve currency system, and climate change. The last section provides a short analysis of recent data on the perception about the EU in the BRICS countries, which points to a general decline of the overall image of the EU.

The **second part** analyses **the EU's strategic partnerships with the BRICS countries** and the impact of the emergence of the new global actors on the objectives of EU's strategic partnerships. Section 2.1 analyses the origins and trajectories of the EU's strategic partnerships with the individual BRICS countries, including a discussion of the various meanings attached to the elusive term 'strategic partnership'. In what historical contexts did these partnerships emerge, have these partnerships continued to deepen and grow more substantive, or have they remained largely rhetorical paper tigers? This provides the setting for an evaluation in Section 2.2 of the current state of the EU's strategic partnerships with the BRICS countries. It examines four areas of the relationships that are deemed as particularly crucial: institutionalisation of the relationship, the perceived value of partnership, security relations, as well as concrete progress and sticking points. Section 2.3 assesses the possible new architecture for the EU's strategic partnerships with the BRICS. It ponders the weakness of the current partnerships and considers the different options available to the EU for further developing the concept of strategic partnerships. This is done by combining a deepening-widening and interests-values

continuum, leading to four potential alternatives for the EU to develop its concept of strategic partnerships (fusing, focusing, diffusing and diluting). Each alternative represents a way for the EU to deal with rising international influence of the BRICS and involves certain opportunity costs and trade-offs especially in its relationship with its more established partners. While muddling through is likely to remain the default option, it is time for the EU to think more strategically about which of these options might be most appropriate to represent its interest and values as an international actor in the future.

The last section of this study formulates **final conclusions and policy recommendations** for the EU, including recommendations for the High Representative, the European External Action Service and the European Parliament.

1. ASSESSMENT OF THE BRICS' FOREIGN POLICY DIMENSION

1.1 FROM BRICs TO BRICS: ORIGIN AND TRAJECTORY

In 2001, the chief economist of Goldman Sachs launched the acronym 'BRIC' in order to focus attention on the major potential of the economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China. Goldman Sachs developed long-term projections, which were quite daunting for the European countries. The Chinese economy was expected to surpass the German economy in merely a couple of years time and the other BRIC countries would manage over the longer term to surpass the size of the economies of all large EU member states. The Goldman Sachs publication also contained a political message: it warned that world policymaking forums had to be re-organized in order to incorporate BRIC representatives.¹

Five years after the launch of the BRIC-acronym, Brazil, Russia, India and China effectively started a process of political dialogue.² In 2006 their ministers of foreign affairs met for the first time in the BRIC format within the context of the UN General Assembly meeting, followed by other ministerial meetings on the margins of UN and G20 meetings. The BRIC format was further upgraded from mid-2008 onwards with stand-alone meetings of the ministers of foreign affairs, the ministers of finance, the ministers of agriculture, the ministers of health and ultimately also the heads of state or government of the four countries – with a summit meeting being organized in Russia in 2009, Brazil in 2010, China in 2011 and one scheduled for 2012 in India. Less visible, but at least as significant, is that the meetings on a political level are complemented by an increasing number of diplomatic meetings on lower levels, as well as meetings of civil servants and experts of specialised ministries and agencies that cover an increasingly wide scope of issues – ranging from high representatives for security issues and anti-terrorist units to competition authorities and governors of central banks. This gradually more intensive network is further strengthened through the increasing number of bilateral (and sometimes also trilateral) meetings, organized on the margins of BRICS meetings and during bilateral visits of politicians, civil servants and experts from these countries.

The 'Joint Statement of the BRIC Countries' Leaders'³, adopted during **the first summit meeting in Yekaterinburg in 2009, points to the two main goals and tenets of this new political club, which remain valid.** Firstly, it emphasised the 'central role played by the G20 Summits in dealing with the financial crisis'. This reflected the success of the BRICs in advancing the G20 as an international forum to tackle the financial crisis and to foster policy coordination and political dialogue, and this to the detriment of Western-dominated forums in which they are excluded (such as the G7) or only have a marginal position (see Section 1.4). They also found good reasons for their position as their economic growth was not only stronger than predicted by Goldman Sachs, but had even led the global recovery after the 2008–2009 financial crisis.⁴ This highlighted that they were not only a threat or challenge for the Europeans, but also an essential part of the solution to the world's economic problems.

Secondly, moving beyond the economic agenda, the Joint Statement underlined their 'support for a more democratic and just multi-polar world order based on the rule of international law, equality, mutual respect, cooperation, coordinated action and collective decision-making of all states'. This reflected their common willingness to counter a unipolar world in which the United States dominates as well as an 'unjust' Western-dominated multilateral world in which not all emerging powers have the same status as their European counterparts (cf. the UK and France in the UN Security Council); in which

¹ O'Neill, 2001; Wilson and Purushothaman, 2003.

² See also Keukeleire and Bruyninckx, 2011.

³ President of Russia – Official Web Portal, 2009b.

⁴ Yamakawa et al., 2009.

respect for their positions and interests is not guaranteed; and in which they have no guaranteed involvement in collective decision-making. These concerns, as well as their opposition to the unilateralism of the West were also evident in the emphasis of the Joint Statement on 'their strong commitment to multilateral diplomacy with the United Nations playing the central role in dealing with global challenges and threats' and with the UN needing a comprehensive reform, including a greater role for India and Brazil. The Joint Statement also situated the BRIC framework within a broader perspective as their dialogue and cooperation was presented as conducive 'of building a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity' as well as 'to serving common interests of emerging market economies and developing countries' – with the latter being seen as mirroring their international legitimacy.

The claim that they were serving the common interests of emerging market economies and developing countries was further strengthened when **the four BRIC countries in December 2010 decided to admit South Africa into their group, which early 2011 was transformed from 'BRIC' into 'BRICS'**. In April 2011, the South African President Zuma participated as a full member in the third summit meeting, joining the Chinese President Hu Jintao, the Russian President Medvedev, Indian Prime Minister Singh and the new Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff. In view of its rather small economy and population, it would seem that South Africa does not fit in the group. But its close involvement in the Climate Summit in Copenhagen and its growing regional and international political weight provided South Africa an entrance ticket to this exclusive club. With the BRICS now also including an African country, the BRICS format can claim to not only represent a major part of the world population and of the world's leading emerging economies, but now also all the continents.

An exceptional situation occurred in 2011 when not only China and Russia, but also Brazil, India and South Africa as non-permanent members were part of the UN Security Council, which provided a further impetus for attempts to strengthen cooperation (see also Section 1.3). This was also mentioned after the 2011 BRICS summit meeting⁵:

We underscore that the current presence of all five BRICS countries in the Security Council during the year of 2011 is a valuable opportunity to work closely together on issues of peace and security, to strengthen multilateral approaches and to facilitate future coordination on issues under UN Security Council consideration.

It remains unclear, however, what the extent of the meetings among BRICS countries' officials exactly is, given the fact that barely any formal statements are released after these meetings. Nevertheless, the launch of the BRICS Action Plan in April 2011 during the third summit between the heads of state and government suggests a formalisation and upgrade of their relations.

The development and strengthening of the BRICS format in the last couple of years confirms what has been emphasized in one of the first studies on the potential of the BRICS,⁶ that **they have several features in common which distinguish them from other (emerging) powers and which bring them closer to each other**. Firstly, they possess a range of economic, military and political power resources and some capacity to contribute to the production of regional or global order. Secondly, they share the belief that they are entitled to gain a more influential role in world affairs. And thirdly, they are outside or on the margin of the US-led set of international and multilateral structures and are not closely integrated in an alliance system with the US. It is this combination of factors, which explains the eagerness of the BRICS 'to strengthen their mutual relations and to promote alternative or

⁵ BRICS Joint Declaration, 2011.

⁶ Hurrell, 2006: 1–3.

complementary international forums and linkages beyond the predominant Western-dominated organisations'.⁷

However, it is important to emphasize beforehand that the intensification of relations between the BRICS and the achievement of some successes should not mask the fact that **the five BRICS countries may perhaps constitute a 'political club', but do not systematically form a bloc**. The following section on the position of the BRICS in the UN will demonstrate this in more detail, but it is useful to point already in this context to some major differences and divergences which make the possibility of the BRICS dialogue being transformed into a strong BRICS bloc rather limited. The five countries indeed differ substantially: in terms of demographic, political, economic and military power and weight (see Table 1); in terms of internal political and societal system; and in terms of their regional and global ambitions.⁸

Table 1: The BRICS: Indices of power

	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa
Population in millions (2010)	194,946	142,958	1.224,614	1.341,355	50,133
Surface area (in 100 sq km)	8.514,9	17.098,2	3.287,3	9.598,1	1.219,1
GDP in billions of Euros (2010)	1.576,8	1.105,1	1.160,1	4.434,1	269,5
GDP per capita in Euros (2010)	8.159,1	7.873,2	954,1	3.305,5	5.399,3
EU27 import in million euro (2010)	32.320,4	158.384,9	33.147,3	282.011,1	17.912,1
EU27 export in million euro (2010)	31.282,9	86.508,8	34.798,8	113.117,7	21.506,6
Permanent member UNSC⁹	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Nuclear weapons¹⁰	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Military expenditure in million USD (2010)	28,096	52,586	34,816	114,300	3,735
Military expenditure as percentage of GDP (2009)	1.6	4.3	2.8	2.2	1.3
Active Military personnel (according to the IISS MB 2011)	318,480	1,046,000	1,325,000	2,285,000	62,082

Sources: European Commission DG Trade, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, Arms Control Association, IISS Military Balance

Generally, China has the greatest potential to act as a world power, while Brazil and South Africa stand out because they perform less well on most indices of power. Brazil, India and South Africa are full-fledged democracies, whereas Russia is characterized by its 'sovereign democracy' and China rejects Western-inspired democratic reforms. China and Russia are both permanent members of the UNSC and, just as India, possess nuclear weapons. Importantly, in view of their different geographic situations, it is evident that they are concerned about, different parts of the world. To give three examples: events in Georgia, Taiwan or Kashmir ring a different bell in Moscow, Beijing and New Delhi. The various opposite interests, including the potential for territorial conflicts (particularly between Russia and China and

⁷ Keukeleire and Bruyninckx, 2011: 385.

⁸ See also Cameron, 2011.

⁹ Brazil is a non-permanent member of the UNSC until the end of 2011. India and South Africa until end-2012.

¹⁰ Except for India all BRICS countries have signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

between China and India), are also an argument against the emergence of a coherent and amicable BRICS-bloc.

1.2 VARIATIONS ON THE BRICS FORMAT AND ON 'EFFECTIVE MULTILATERALISM'

The creation and development of the BRICS format has to be seen within the broader context of a growing number of emerging (or re-emerging) regional powers and contacts between these powers, including through a multitude of partially overlapping and complementary multilateral frameworks in the Southern hemisphere, in particular in the Asia-Pacific where Western countries are mostly not represented¹¹ (see Figure 1). **The BRICS phenomenon mirrors a general shift in the international balance of power, with the centre of gravity moving from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific area and from the North and West to the South and East** – the emergence of the G20 being yet another indication of this wider process (see 1.4).

Firstly, increasing dialogue and cooperation in several variations on the BRICS format:

- *RIC*: trilateral meetings with Russia, India and China (last year the 10th trilateral meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Russia, India and China was held);
- *IBSA*: the trilateral IBSA initiative, which was formally launched in 2003 with India, Brazil and South Africa;
- *BASIC*: the BASIC-format with Brazil, South Africa, India and China was launched in November 2009 with a Joint Strategy for the UN Framework Convention Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Copenhagen where they eventually sidelined the EU and negotiated a deal with the US. Since then, frequent ministerial meetings have taken place on these issues.
- *Bilateral relations*: a large and increasing number of bilateral meetings are organized on various political, diplomatic and bureaucratic levels between the BRICS countries (particularly Russia-China, Russia-India, India-China and Brazil-Russia).

These variations on the BRICS-theme are not surprising in view of the differences and divergences, which exist between the five BRICS countries. These various formats can be seen as a sign of weakness of the BRICS formula, but can also be perceived as a sign of flexibility that allows the BRICS countries to choose the format, which best fits their purposes and to avoid divergences leading to inertia. The various formats seem to reinforce each other; statements issued in the context of one format often include references to the other formats.

Secondly, Russia, China and India have been promoting the multilateralisation of their dialogues and trialogues and the inclusion of other countries in the region, with several international forums emerging in which particularly Russia, China and/or India play a role. These include:

- the *Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO)*, including Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, with India, Pakistan, Iran and Mongolia as observers);
- the *South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC)*, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Nine countries, including China, the EU and the USA possess observer status;
- the *ASEAN+3* process (including the ASEAN countries plus China, Japan and Korea);

¹¹ Keukeleire and Bruyninckx, 2011: 397–401.

- the *East Asia Summit*, including China, India, together with other Asian countries as well as Australia and New Zealand;

Thirdly, the major geo-economic and geo-political shift from the previously predominant Transatlantic area to the rising Asia-Pacific area is also reflected in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). APEC brings together 21 states in the Asia-Pacific region, including major powers such as China, the US and Russia and emerging or mid-sized powers in Asia (including ASEAN countries plus Japan and Korea), the American continent (Canada, Mexico, Peru and Chile), as well as Australia and New Zealand – accounting together for approximately 40% of the world's population, 44% of world trade and 54% of world GDP (APEC 2010). Most importantly, it provides a link between the increasingly important Asian continent and the still largest global political, economic and military power: the United States.

All these international forums have one feature in common. It is a world where the EU is absent, where Europe is considered far away, and in most cases also as irrelevant – with the exception of the WTO, the G20 and some other multilateral forums where 'Brussels' and the European approaches have to be dealt with and, if necessary, countered or blocked. In this sense, in view of the differences between the BRICS countries, it is not in itself a problem that the EU has not developed a 'BRICS policy' and has focused on bilateral policies towards each of these countries separately. However, **'it is more problematic that the EU has no policy to deal with the generally changing balance of power in the 21st century – a phenomenon in which the rise of the BRICs has to be situated'**.¹²

Interestingly, Europeans often dismiss these new forums for dialogue, coordination and cooperation as not really significant in view of the lack of legally binding commitments in these settings. However, it may be more adequate to **recognize that the BRICS countries and the other Asian or Southern countries have made 'the choice for multilateralism' too – just like the Europeans – but that it is a choice for multilateralism based on fundamentally different principles with regard to both contents and approach.** The way APEC presents itself is in this context quite illuminating and also illustrative of the other frameworks in which the BRICS countries do play a role¹³:

[APEC] is the premier forum for facilitating economic growth, cooperation, trade and investment in the Asia-Pacific region. APEC is the only intergovernmental grouping in the world operating on the basis of non-binding commitments, open dialogue and equal respect for the views of all participants. Unlike the WTO or other multilateral trade bodies, APEC has no treaty obligations required of its participants. Decisions made within APEC are reached by consensus and commitments are undertaken on a voluntary basis.

This description points to a clear prioritisation of economic growth and development, which can be linked to the reluctance of BRICS countries to let economic development be restricted by concerns in other policy domains that the Europeans consider important, such as environment, social protection or human rights. It points to a preference for a pure intergovernmental approach, with decision-making by consensus, absence of treaty obligations and voluntary commitments, which is opposed to the European preference for legally binding commitments and powerful international organisations/regimes. It reflects strong determination to protect national sovereignty – a principle also shared by the EU's main partner, the United States.

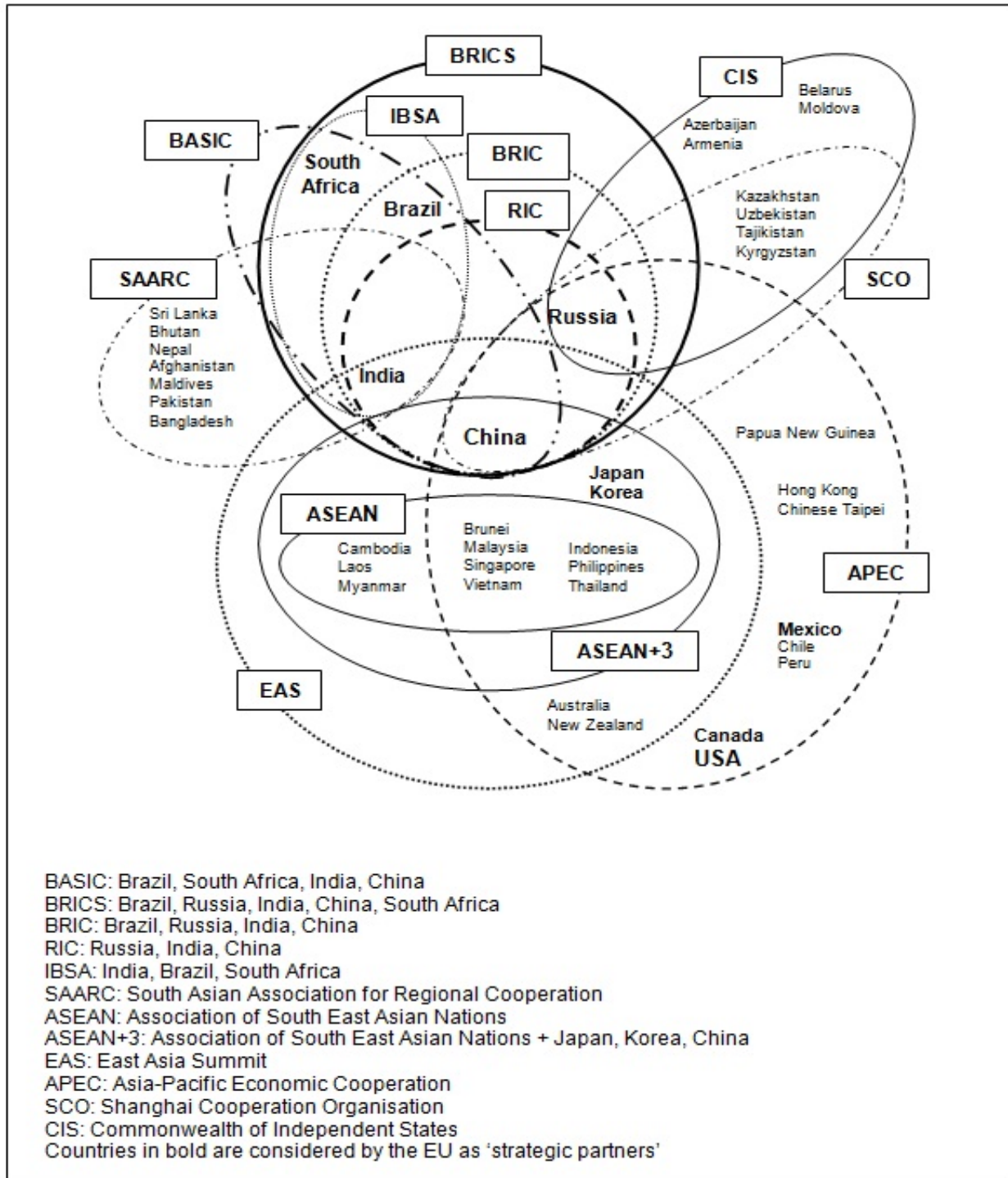
In other words, whereas the EU had hoped that its model of 'effective multilateralism' (based on legally binding commitments and treaties) would gradually become the global standard, with the interaction

¹² Ibid: 385.

¹³ APEC, 2010.

between the EU and UN becoming an increasingly important point of reference,¹⁴ the EU, in fact, sees itself increasingly marginalised with regard to the way the international scene is structured. The EU was regularly blinded by the references to effective multilateralism in its partnerships and other agreements with the individual BRICS countries, leading to the false impression that these were all 'Partnerships for effective multilateralism'.¹⁵

Figure 1: The BRICS and other emerging powers and multilateral frameworks



Note: Own design by Yannick Schoensetters and Stephan Keukeleire (based on Keukeleire and Bruyninckx, 2011: 400).

¹⁴ European Commission, 2003; Laatikainen and Smith, 2006; Wouters et al., 2008.

¹⁵ Grevi and Vasconcelos, 2008.

Figure 1 gives an overview of the various partially overlapping and complementary emerging constellations of power and multilateral frameworks in the southern part of the world, Asia and the Pacific. It reflects an increasingly dense set of formal and informal networks and personal and professional contacts between a growing number of ministers, diplomats, senior as well as specialized civil servants and agencies which are responsible for a continuously widening set of policy issues and which meet each other more and more in various forums in addition to their bilateral contacts. Interestingly, neither the BRICS nor any of the other variations or multilateral frameworks can be considered as really coherent, powerful and influential as such. Nor does this increasing number of meetings lead to real 'hard' decisions. However, **these rather diffuse overlapping sets of bilateralisms, trilateralism and multilateralism do increasingly have an impact on the outcome of international negotiations**, because they inform and impact upon the national positions of the various participating countries as well as upon UN negotiations and various specialized international negotiation processes.

The clearest and for the Europeans most painful example of this emerging and increasingly important set of partially overlapping multilateral forums was the marginalization of the EU in the Climate Conference in Copenhagen in December 2009. **The Copenhagen Accord was essentially brokered by the BASIC countries** and Australia, thereby successfully representing and defending the 'Southern' position in the climate change debate, **with the US managing to break into the deal and the EU being largely sidelined**. In the final stage of the conference, these countries formulated the accord outside of the formal negotiations dynamic, with the fundamental option (not to accept binding commitments) being taken, not in Copenhagen itself, but at the preceding APEC meeting in Singapore in November 2009. It illustrates that the BRICS and other emerging powers' interpretation of and choice for multilateralism was in fact a 'choice for multilateralism', and they were effective in using the various multilateral frameworks to impact upon the final result in the way they prefer.¹⁶ For an extended discussion of the climate change negotiations, see Section 1.4.

1.3 VOTING PATTERNS OF THE BRICS IN THE UN

This section seeks to answer questions related to the voting patterns of the BRICS countries at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Do the BRICS countries vote as a bloc? What are the implications of these outcomes for the EU?

Before moving to the analysis of the BRICS countries' cohesion in the UNGA, it is useful to explain why this study focuses on the voting pattern in the UNGA and not – as might seem more logical – on voting in the more important UN Security Council (UNSC). The first reason is that only Russia and China are permanent members of the Security Council and that the UNSC rarely includes all five BRICS countries – which makes a comparative analysis of the voting cohesion of the BRICS countries in the UNSC over a longer period of time impossible. However, as was already pointed out in Section 1.1, an exceptional situation occurred in 2011 when, by chance, not only China and Russia, but also Brazil, India and South Africa were part of the UN's most powerful body, as non-permanent members. This appears to provide a perfect context to assess the voting cohesion of the BRICS in the UNSC during that year. A survey of the voting behaviour illuminates that the BRICS countries cast identical votes on 37 of the 38 UNSC resolutions voted upon in 2011 until 1 September.¹⁷ The only resolution where split votes were cast was Resolution 1973 on the situation in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya where Brazil, China, India and Russia

¹⁶ Keukeleire and Bruyninckx, 2011: 399–400.

¹⁷ Website UN Security Council, 2011.

abstained and South Africa voted 'yes'.¹⁸ However, this high extent of cohesion is not particularly remarkable. In 36 of the 38 UNSC resolutions, which were voted upon in the UNSC in the first eight months of 2011, all 15 Security Council members voted in favour of the resolution. This confirms what Drieskens and Bouchard note: 'the UNSC largely operates by consensus and divisive issues are rarely pushed to a vote'.¹⁹ This means that the BRICS score is part of a broader coalition, and that analysing the voting cohesion of these five countries in the UNSC does not tell us that much.²⁰

This analysis therefore provides a quantitative analysis of the voting cohesion of the five BRICS countries in the UNGA and in the Main Committees of the UNGA in the period 2006–2011, thereby covering five sessions of the UN General Assembly from the 61st session to the 65th session.²¹ The year 2006 is chosen as the first year in the analysis since the political dialogue on the margins of the UNGA meeting started between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Brazil, Russia, India and China in that year. This analysis also includes the voting behaviour of South Africa in the last five sessions of the UNGA, to allow for a comparative analysis of the BRICS framework in that period. South Africa only became part of the BRIC(S) in January 2011, some months after the start of the 65th session.

The method used to measure the level of voting cohesion between the BRICS countries is to examine – on the total number of resolutions in the UNGA that were accepted after a vote – in how many cases (both in absolute terms and in percentage) resolutions were passed with complete agreement, partial agreement or complete disagreement between the five BRICS countries.²² In this study, the following criteria were used to determine whether complete agreement, partial agreement or complete disagreement exists:²³

- Complete agreement implies that the BRICS countries cast identical votes (either yes or no) or that they were all abstaining;
- Partial agreement implies that most BRICS countries voted either yes or no, but that one or more of the BRICS countries were abstaining;
- Complete disagreement implies that at least two BRICS countries cast opposite votes (this means that at least one country voted for and at least one country against).

Before moving to the results of this quantitative analysis, it is useful to enter some caveats.²⁴ Most importantly, only a 20–30% minority of the resolutions voted upon, which means that the vast majority of the UNGA resolutions pass the UNGA without vote.²⁵ In addition, only passed resolutions are recorded as specified by the UN, others are only given the numbers of countries that voted in favour, against or abstained. Additionally, as was already mentioned with regard to the UNGA, cohesion between BRICS states can be part of much broader cohesion among the UN members, hence diminishing the relevance of the cohesion found in this study. Furthermore, Drieskens notes that the concept of voting cohesion does not have similar 'explanatory power' for the different UN bodies. Meaning that it 'may be a powerful tool for measuring regional actorness at the UNGA, but not for the

¹⁸ United Nations Bibliographic Information System, 2011.

¹⁹ Drieskens and Bouchard, 2012.

²⁰ Generally, the veto right that permanent members possess is seldom used (usually once or twice a year). It is thus more the threat of the veto than its actual use that functions as a major obstacle.

²¹ Sessions of the UNGA always start in September. The 66th session is not included in this analysis since this session started only on 13 September 2011.

²² For a quantitative analysis measuring 'voting distance' between BRIC countries, see Hooijmaaijers, 2011.

²³ The UN categorizes the votes on resolutions as 'yes', 'no', 'abstain' and 'absent'. To fit this in the categories used in this study, 'absent' will be seen as 'abstaining', since both categories have non-voting in common.

²⁴ See e.g. Kissack, 2007.

²⁵ Luif, 2003: 22

UNSC'.²⁶ Finally, a quantitative analysis should ideally also be complemented by a detailed qualitative assessment of each vote in order, firstly, to detect the context and importance of the resolutions – not every resolution is as significant, either in general or for the EU – and, secondly, to learn more about the context and meaning of the voting behaviour of the five BRICS countries. For instance, abstaining can have different political meanings in different contexts. However, such a detailed qualitative assessment is not possible within the scope of this study.

Nevertheless, since the UNGA is 'the only forum in which a large number of states meet and vote on a regular basis on issues concerning the international community',²⁷ the voting behaviour in this forum can still function as a useful political barometer and provide a useful indicator of the degree of cohesion among the BRICS countries. However, this voting behaviour is merely one indicator of the general cohesion in the foreign policy of the BRICS countries.

Table 2: Overall BRICS cohesion in the UN General Assembly (number and percentage of resolutions)

	2006–2007		2007–2008		2008–2009		2009–2010		2010–2011	
Complete agreement	53	61,6%	47	59,5%	44	57,9%	39	56,5%	46	63,0%
Partial agreement	27	31,4%	24	30,4%	27	35,5%	24	34,8%	21	28,8%
Complete disagreement	6	7,0%	8	10,1%	5	6,6%	6	8,7%	6	8,2%
Resolutions with vote	86	100%	79	100%	76	100%	69	100%	73	100%

Source: Data retrieved from unbisnet.un.org

Table 2 demonstrates that in the period 2006–2011 the BRICS countries were in complete agreement regarding only 56–63% of the resolutions that were voted upon, in partial agreement regarding 28–35% of resolutions, and in complete disagreement regarding 6–10% of resolutions. **Overall, it is not possible to discern a BRICS-bloc in the UNGA in that time-period. Another conclusion that can be drawn is that there is no significant increase of voting cohesion since the start of the consultations in the BRIC framework in 2006.** There is slightly more full agreement in 2010–2011 than in the preceding three years, but it is impossible to tell whether this reflects the start of intensified BRICS consultation and a tendency towards more cohesion (all the BRICS being in 2011 members of the UNSC and adoption of the Action Plan). Discerning possible long-term trends will only be possible after a few years.

Further insight can be gained by also looking at the level of cohesion in the subsidiary organs of the General Assembly, which prepare the work of the plenary meeting of the Assembly and which draft resolutions and decisions. In this study, we focus on the three 'Main Committees' of the UN General Assembly that are concerned with foreign policy issues.²⁸ Table 3 shows that complete agreement occurs in the *Disarmament and International Security Committee* (or 'First Committee') in less than half of the cases: complete agreement existed indeed with regard to only 28–46% of the resolutions voted upon in the period 2006–2011. Moreover, as far as trends can be derived from a period of only five years, the table rather points to a trend of decreasing agreement among the BRICS. Complete

²⁶ Drieskens, 2012.

²⁷ Voeten, 2000: 185–186.

²⁸ The other 'Main Committees', which are left out in the analysis, are the Economic and Financial Committee (Second Committee), the Administrative and Budgetary Committee (Fifth Committee) and the Legal Committee (Sixth Committee). These are committees, which rarely or never vote.

disagreement only occurred on a limited number of issues. India cast opposite votes compared to the other BRICS countries on several resolutions regarding a nuclear-weapon-free world, which can be explained by the fact that India has not signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. India also cast an opposite vote on the resolution on conventional arms control at the regional and sub-regional levels. Russia cast opposite votes on the follow-up to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons.

Table 3: BRICS cohesion in Disarmament and International Security Committee (number and % of resolutions)

	2006–2007		2007–2008		2008–2009		2009–2010		2010–2011	
Complete agreement	14	46,7%	11	42,3%	11	39,3%	6	28,5%	8	34,8%
Partial agreement	12	40,0%	10	38,5%	14	50,0%	10	47,6%	12	52,2%
Complete disagreement	4	13,3%	5	19,2%	3	10,7%	5	23,8%	3	13,0%
Resolutions with vote	30	100%	26	100%	28	100%	21	100%	23	100%

Source: Data retrieved from unbisnet.un.org

The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (or 'Third Committee') is quite important from a foreign policy perspective, as it is in this committee that issues related to human rights are tackled. Interestingly, complete agreement among the BRICS countries occurred in only a small majority of the resolutions that were voted upon (fluctuating between 52% and 67%), besides the significant number of partial agreements and a limited number of complete disagreements. China and India recorded more opposite votes than the other BRICS countries in the years 2007, 2008 and 2010 on the moratorium on the use of the death penalty. China, India and Russia took opposite positions from Brazil and South Africa in the entire 2006–2011 period on the situation of human rights in Myanmar. In 2006–2008, Brazil voted for and South Africa abstained, while in 2009 and 2010 Brazil abstained and South Africa voted in favour of this resolution. Furthermore, both China and Russia did so in 2006, 2007 and 2010 on the resolutions concerning the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In 2006 and 2007, Brazil voted in favour of this resolution, China and Russia opposed, with the other two abstaining. In 2010, both China and Russia voted against the resolution on North Korea with the other three abstaining.

Table 4: BRICS cohesion in the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (number and % of resolutions)

	2006–2007		2007–2008		2008–2009		2009–2010		2010–2011	
Complete agreement	11	52,4%	13	61,9%	10	52,6%	10	66,7%	10	62,5%
Partial agreement	8	38,1%	5	23,8%	7	36,8%	4	26,7%	3	18,8%
Complete disagreement	2	9,5%	3	14,3%	2	10,5%	1	6,7%	3	18,8%
Resolutions with vote	21	100%	21	100%	19	100%	15	100%	16	100%

Source: Data retrieved from unbisnet.un.org

The Fourth Committee or *Special Political and Decolonization Committee* deals with decolonization and a variety of political subjects, which are not dealt with by the First and the Third Committee. This committee is particularly interesting since three of the BRICS countries have a colonial past (Brazil, India

and South Africa) and since it also deals with one of the most sensitive issues in global politics: the Israel-Palestine dispute. On the vast majority of the resolutions that touch upon decolonization issues and the Israel-Palestine dispute, the BRICS countries cast identical votes (fluctuating between 75% and 88% of the resolutions). Importantly, there were no full disagreements in this Committee between the BRICS countries in the period 2006–2011 and this is also the only Main Committee where a tendency towards more cohesion amongst the BRICS countries can be discerned. In the past five years, it was only Russia that abstained in a limited number of cases and that therefore cast split votes with the other BRICS countries: on resolutions concerning the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and concerning the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. On these issues, Russia abstained while the other BRICS voted in favour of it. For comparison, the EU member states generally abstain on these issues with only two exceptions in recent years: Austria on Palestinian people and Spain on colonial countries and peoples, both in 2007.

Table 5: BRICS cohesion in the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (number and % of resolutions)

	2006–2007		2007–2008		2008–2009		2009–2010		2010–2011	
Complete agreement	12	75,0%	12	85,7%	12	85,7%	12	85,7%	15	88,2%
Partial agreement	4	25,0%	2	14,3%	2	14,3%	2	14,3%	2	11,8%
Complete disagreement	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%
Resolutions with vote	16	100%	14	100%	14	100%	14	100%	17	100%

Source: Data retrieved from unbisnet.un.org

The data on the voting behaviour of the BRICS countries in the three foreign policy related Main Committees provide some more insight into the nature of the BRICS countries' cohesion (although prudence is required in view of the caveats that were formulated earlier). **Compared to the assessment of the overall cohesion in the UNGA, BRICS cohesion seems even more limited with regard to resolutions related to disarmament and international security, but stronger with regard to resolutions passed in the Special Political and Decolonization Committee.** Whereas limited bloc formation might be detected in the latter committee, this is not at all the case in the Disarmament and International Security Committee or in the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee.

As mentioned in section 1.1, it remains rather unclear what the extent of meetings between BRICS nations officials is and therefore it is hard to depict the number of cases where the BRICS nations coordinated their positions. Nonetheless, the launch of the BRICS Action Plan suggests a formalisation of their relations on a broad field. Despite these intentions, however, the data over the past five years does not show a clear sign of a systematic increase of the BRICS cohesion at the UNGA, and therefore currently the BRICS can hardly be seen as a cohesive bloc.

What are the implications for the EU of the dual conclusion that the BRICS countries are not operating as a cohesive bloc at the UNGA and that there is also no clear sign of a significant increase of the BRICS cohesion in the period 2006–2011? **For the time being, the data does not provide an argument for the EU to approach this group of countries as a bloc. It may therefore be more worthwhile for the EU to engaging more intensively with separate BRICS countries or with other configurations of the five BRICS countries.**

Table 6: Overall complete agreement among the five constellations (number and percentage of resolutions)

	2006–2007		2007–2008		2008–2009		2009–2010		2010–2011	
BRICS	53	61,6%	47	59,5%	44	57,9%	39	56,5%	46	63,0%
BRIC	54	62,8%	48	60,8%	44	57,9%	40	58,0%	46	63,0%
RIC	61	70,9%	53	67,1%	50	65,8%	45	65,2%	47	64,4%
BASIC	60	69,8%	55	69,6%	49	64,5%	50	72,5%	56	76,7%
IBSA	62	72,1%	58	73,4%	56	73,7%	52	75,4%	60	82,2%

Source: Data retrieved from unbisnet.un.org

A closer look at the voting behaviour in the several variations on the BRICS format shows that **the highest degree of cohesion can be found in the IBSA format (India, Brazil and South Africa)**, which also reflects the different nature of these three countries in comparison with China and Russia. Over the period of five years, the percentages of full agreement are significantly higher than in the case of the BRICS constellation. Removing Russia and China from the analysis, we find that India, Brazil and South Africa cast identical votes in 70% of resolutions (in 2010 even over 80%). Compared to the roughly 60% of the BRICS constellation, this can be seen as quite a significant difference. The cohesion of the BASIC configuration (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) is overall somewhat lower compared to that of IBSA, but with an average complete agreement of 70%, it remains significantly higher than the BRICS voting cohesion. The RIC variation (Russia, India and China) shows a 65–70% of identical votes cast, making this percentage insignificantly lower than for the BASIC countries. The original BRIC countries' overall percentage of full agreement is, not surprisingly, situated around 60 percent, between the BRICS score and RIC score. In short: **the ranking from high to low when it comes to overall voting coincidence at the UN General Assembly over the 2006–2010 period is IBSA, BASIC, RIC, BRIC, and ultimately BRICS.**

This ranking may suggest that the EU may chose to primarily focus on the IBSA countries, not only because they are the most cohesive group, but also because the nature of their political system is most similar to that of the EU countries. **However, a closer look at specific foreign policy issues demonstrates that engaging more with the IBSA countries is not self-evident.** This is also the case in a domain, which is highly important for the EU: human rights. The analysis of Gowan and Brantner²⁹ on the EU and human rights at the UN confirms that the positions of particularly Brazil and South Africa are closer to the positions of the EU than those of the other BRICS countries since China, India and Russia cast identical votes with the EU in only 25% of the cases. Brazil and South Africa can also be considered as swing voters, which can be useful for the EU in view of developing a strategy aimed at gaining more support for its positions. However, both countries consider respect for national sovereignty, non-intervention and equality between nations as very important, which also implies that they often consider these values as more important than the promotion of human rights and democracy, which explains their divergence with the EU's positions.³⁰ Although Brazil is labeled by Gowan and Brantner as belonging to the group of 'Liberal Internationalists', the voting coincidence at the UN General Assembly with the EU member states remained on a level of less than 50%.³¹ South Africa is even more clearly part of what they call the 'Axis of Sovereignty', which is a group of countries that casts identical votes with the EU member states less than 35% of the time.

²⁹ Gowan and Brantner, 2010: 4.

³⁰ Kumar, 2008.

³¹ Gowan and Brantner, 2010.

Some examples can help to illustrate that the EU cannot automatically count on the IBSA countries, not even on Brazil and South Africa. In the 2010/2011 UNGA session, EU member states voted unanimously in favour of the resolution on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. China and Russia, together with 43 other states, voted against this resolution, while Brazil, India and South Africa, together with 56 others, abstained. On the resolution concerning the situation of human rights in Myanmar the EU finds itself again situated opposite both China and Russia. In this case, India as well as 23 other states joined their coalition, Brazil abstained, and only South Africa voted similar as the EU27. A similar situation can be observed on the adopted UNGA resolution on the situation of human rights in the North Korea. The EU cast identical votes in favour of this resolution, China and Russia voted against, India and South Africa as well as 55 others abstained, while Brazil voted together with the EU member states.³²

Moreover, **although Brazil and South Africa can at least be seen as so-called swing voters, a worrying trend for the EU over the past few years is that both have been moving away from the EU and its viewpoints.** Another worrying trend for the EU is that it is not only usually lined up against China and Russia, but also that 'the overall level of support for China and Russia has grown significantly'.³³ The same pattern appears in the Human Rights Council (HRC) where the EU's actual influence is lacking, despite the fact that the EU generally speaks with one voice, and where China and Russia also actively oppose EU positions.³⁴

This quite worrisome situation for the EU indicates that **it is important for the EU and its member states to actively engage with South Africa, Brazil and possibly also India – which, however, requires from the EU that it listens more carefully to their positions and takes more into account their interests.** Engaging more actively with these countries is particularly important as the IBSA countries often have a higher international credibility than the EU in Africa, Asia and Latin America. This is also reflected in the fact that these countries often take the position of one of the IBSA countries as a point of reference for determining their own position when casting a vote in the UNGA and its various Committees. This also means that if the EU can manage to convince one or more of the IBSA countries to join the EU position, a significant number of other countries may follow, which, in turn, may increase the ability of the EU to find sufficient support for its positions.

1.4 IMPACT ON DECISION-MAKING OF NEW INTERNATIONAL FORUMS

The emerging powers' increasing importance is reflected also in the informal forums of global governance, within which two key trends can be observed.³⁵ Firstly, these informal forums have become increasingly important in addressing global challenges and crises. Secondly, the role of Western-dominated informal cooperation manifested in the G8 and G7 is decreasing,³⁶ while the role of broader forums, such as the G20, as well as new forms of cooperation among the key emerging powers (such as BRICS, BASIC and IBSA cooperation) has increased.

³² UN Bibliographic Information System, 2011.

³³ Gowan and Brantner, 2010: 1-2, 25.

³⁴ Smith, 2010.

³⁵ Jokela, 2011.

³⁶ Russia has participated in the G-7 post summit dialogues since 1991. The 1998 Birmingham Summit saw full Russian participation, giving birth to the Group of Eight, or G8 (although the G7 continued to function alongside the formal summits).

The BRICS countries share the objective of making key informal groups more inclusive and they played an important role in promoting the G20 as the world's new premium forum of economic cooperation. They have also achieved concrete goals. The G20 was set up at a ministerial level in 1999 in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis. In 2007, the G8 started regular structured cooperation with five key emerging powers (Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa), and in 2008 – in the midst of global financial crisis – the G20 was upgraded to the leaders' level.

Currently, prospects for increasing BRICS cooperation do exist. Firstly, while the G7 – at the level of finance ministers and central bank governors – has retained some of its relevance in the field of financial issues, the G8 is relevant in many other fields of global governance. Secondly, the size of the G20 – comprising 19 states and the EU, as well as invited representatives from other relevant states and international organizations – points towards the role of coalition formation within the G20. The coordination among 'sub-groups' of the G20 is most noticeable between EU members and institutions. The G20 agenda is also addressed directly and indirectly in the G8 and G7 groups because of their overlapping agenda with the G20. Furthermore, and as suggested in section 1.1, the G20 has been high on the agenda of BRIC/BRICS cooperation.

The key question of this section is whether commitment to the G20 process has led to common positions and coordination among the BRICS countries also on the more concrete level of agenda-setting and policy-making in the G20 and other new forums. In our analysis,³⁷ we focus on four issues of potential BRICS cooperation within the G20 that have been particularly visible on the BRICS countries' G20 agendas: (i) reforming the Bretton Woods institutions (the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank); (ii) the regulation of cross-border capital flows; (iii) improving the international reserve currency system; and (iv) climate change. Significantly, in several of these issues the BRICS countries have emerged as initiators of the debate in the G20. Moreover, in addition to sharing some objectives, certain coordination of strategies can be discerned from their actions.

The G20 and the BRICS summits clearly have an overlapping agenda in reforming the formal multilateral system of global financial and economic governance. In the very first G20 communiqué, the purpose of the G20 was described as 'to provide a new mechanism for informal dialogue in the framework of the Bretton Woods institutional system, to broaden the discussions on key economic and financial policy issues among systemically significant economies and promote co-operation to achieve stable and sustainable world economic growth that benefits all'.³⁸ The main focus of the first BRIC summit in June 2009 was strikingly similar. In the spotlight was the global economic situation and enhancing BRIC cooperation to push forward the reform of global financial and economic governance institutions.

Reforming the Bretton Woods institutions. The Bretton Woods institution reform came onto the agenda of G20 during the Chinese chairmanship in the Xianghe meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors in October 2005. In conjunction with this meeting, the G20 issued a statement on reforming the Bretton Woods institutions. The two main substantive points of the statement are: that quotas and representation should reflect changes in economic weight, and that selection of senior management should be based on merit and ensure broad representation of all member countries.³⁹ Both are points that the BRICS countries have keenly advocated.

³⁷ It should be noted that studying the G20 is hampered by a data problem. Since G20 deliberations are secret and only produce final communications, it is not easy to deduce which positions various countries take in the discussion.

³⁸ G20 communiqué, 1999.

³⁹ The G20 Statement on Reforming Bretton Woods Institutions, 2005.

After 2005, **BRICS countries have kept up the pressure on this issue in the G20. BRICS summits have consistently called for greater voice and representativeness, both through a substantial shift in voting power and by diversifying personnel selection procedures in these organisations.**⁴⁰

On this issue, the interests of BRICS countries converge. Until recently, the gap between emerging economies' real weight in the global economy and their voting power in the IMF had grown ever wider. Recognising this imbalance, the previous managing director of the IMF launched a strategic review of the IMF that resulted in a reallocation of quotas and votes in 2008. In the November 2010 G20 Seoul meeting, a second round of reallocations was agreed on. Some of the IMF voting rights would be reallocated from developed to emerging economies, with dynamic emerging and developing countries receiving an increase in voting shares of 5.7 percentage points (8.8 percentage points compared to pre-2008 reform). In addition to this, Europe would initially lose two of its 10 seats on the executive board. Ultimately, Europe's seats would be reduced to only two or three.⁴¹

Cross-border capital flows. At the G20 Seoul Summit in November 2010, the issue of cross-border capital flows was also put high on the agenda. The G20 Seoul Declaration refers to the need to pursue 'further work on macro-prudential policy frameworks, including tools to help mitigate the impact of excessive capital flows'.⁴² The issue has since proved highly contentious, and a division between the BRICS and the G7 countries has emerged. The BRICS countries have wanted to reserve the right to deploy capital controls in order to limit excessive inflows of speculative capital that could put their economic stability at risk. The EU has expressed its concern over the unilateral use of capital controls, declaring in the G20 terms-of-reference document 'the EU believes in the benefits of the free movement of capital [...] and sees with some concern the increasing use of temporary controls'.⁴³ Despite the hesitance on the part of the EU and the USA, **the BRICS countries have been able to shape the terms of the debate as well as block the (G7-dominated) IMF proposals on capital controls.**

Reflecting the growing power of the BRICS countries in propagating their interests into global discussions within the G20, the IMF has recently re-examined its position on the issue of capital controls. It has recognized that capital flows can be disruptive and that the careful use of capital controls may be needed to smooth such disruption.⁴⁴ As such, the current discussion no longer revolves around the legitimacy of controls as such, but rather on the need for a global regime to regulate capital flows. France, Germany and ECB officials together with the US have called for the IMF to be given a strong role in coordinating and sanctioning the use of capital controls. Accordingly, in preparation for its annual meeting in April 2011, the IMF released a report⁴⁵ in which it proposes a set of rules for the use of capital controls.

The BRICS countries, however, have effectively vetoed this IMF framework. At their meeting in China on 14 April 2011, the BRICS countries expressed their concern about the IMF proposal. Their position came out on the eve of the IMF and the World Bank's developing countries group meeting, also known as the G24. At the behest of Brazil, India, and South Africa, the G24 subsequently also rejected the IMF proposal, stating in a communiqué their disagreement 'with the proposed framework for staff advice to member countries on managing capital flows'.⁴⁶ Finally, at the G20 ministerial meeting the same day in Washington, the BRICS, led by Brazil, refused to endorse the IMF's proposed framework, which

⁴⁰ See e.g. the 2010 BRICS summit declaration.

⁴¹ ADB, 2011: 18-19.

⁴² The G20, 2010.

⁴³ Strupczewski, 2011.

⁴⁴ Cf. Gallagher, 2011.

⁴⁵ IMF, 2011.

⁴⁶ G24, 2011.

effectively sent the IMF back to the drawing board. Hence, as a result of BRICS' resistance the G20 has so far not been able to agree on a proposal to put limits on capital controls.

Improving the international reserve currency system. The reserve currency issue was initially pushed onto the global agenda by a series of three articles penned by the Chinese central bank governor, Zhou Xiaochuan, in March 2009. Zhou argued that the world should gradually move away from dollar-centricity and discussed options that included more extensive use of IMF Special Drawing Rights (SDRs).⁴⁷ However, the issue was controversial even within the Chinese government itself, with Foreign Ministry officials privately downplaying the importance of Zhou's statements.⁴⁸ The reserve currency issue was briefly discussed at the G20 meeting in London in 2009 and presumably in the first BRIC summit two months later in Yekaterinburg. The Russian president's calls for reserve currency system reform in the run up to the summit did not, however, then lead to a publicly announced joint BRIC position.

With the sovereign debt crisis in Europe and American unilateral moves of quantitative easing in 2010, the reserve currency issue has stayed on the BRIC/BRICS summit agendas. In the Sanya meeting in China, 14 April 2011, **the final declaration contained a passage on the need to reform the international reserve currency system, which resonates with the earlier views expressed by the Chinese central bank.** The BRICS stated that they 'support the reform and improvement of the international monetary system, with a broad-based international reserve currency system providing stability and certainty' and they welcomed 'the current discussion about the role of the SDR in the existing international monetary system including the composition of SDR's basket of currencies'.⁴⁹

Climate change. From the mid-2000s the importance of climate change in the summit agendas of the G8 and later the G20 has increased significantly. This largely reflects the recognized need to tackle the issue of climate change on multiple fronts.⁵⁰ The Copenhagen Climate Summit is one of the key events in which the emerging powers increased influence and joint strategy in international climate diplomacy was clearly manifested. **In Copenhagen, China, India, Brazil and South Africa appeared not only to share important objectives, but also played a key role in negotiating the conference's final outcome with the USA.**⁵¹

Russia's modest role in Copenhagen is another significant observation. It suggests that cooperation among emerging powers can take several forms, reflecting the interests at stake in different issue areas. **While it is plausible to focus on BRICS cooperation in some fields of global governance, such as global financial governance, BASIC cooperation (among Brazil, South Africa, India and China) appears to be the key trend on climate issues.**

The emergence of the BASIC group has been seen largely as a response to external pressures. Their increasing emissions have resulted in demands for them (in particular for China and India) to accept compulsory emission targets. After Copenhagen, the group's relevance has been further highlighted. BASIC ministers responsible for climate-related matters have met regularly. According to a recent study on their cooperation, two clear joint policy lines have emerged. Firstly, they have called for a second

⁴⁷ Zhou, 2009.

⁴⁸ Discussion with senior PRC Foreign Ministry officials in Helsinki, May 2009.

⁴⁹ BRICS declaration, 2011.

⁵⁰ While the disagreements among key developed countries have been addressed in various G7 and G8 summits in 1990s and 2000s, the more recent debate has included the key developing countries under the auspices of the G8 Outreach process (the 5 outreach countries are Brazil, China, India, Mexico, and South Africa) and the G20.

⁵¹ Hallding et. al., 2011.

commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol. Secondly, they have highlighted efforts to build bridges with the G77 grouping under the UNFCC.⁵²

Some divisions within the BASIC cooperation have also surfaced. The countries have, for instance, tried to establish a common position on equity as well as on how the remaining carbon space should be shared among countries.⁵³ Nevertheless, reaching a consensus has been difficult.⁵⁴ At times, BASIC countries also seem to proceed without paying attention to each other. India's recent attempts to broker an agreement through the needs-based concept 'equitable access to sustainable development' in the Cancun climate meeting (COP16 of the UNFCC) was seen as a positive opening, but it did not emerge directly via BASIC cooperation. The BASIC cooperation may yet prove to be a temporary and issue-specific development, but given the broader developments, it might also open up opportunities for its members to enhance cooperation also in other fields than climate diplomacy.

The BRICS in informal fora. In summary, we suggest that there are **three main ways in which the BRICS countries have sought to influence G20: agenda-setting; shifting the terms of the debate; and blocking.** Moreover, we argue that different forms of informal cooperation and coordination among the BRICS countries are an increasingly important part of the informal forums of global governance, such as the G20.

In terms of agenda-setting, the BRICS countries have been successful in initiating new discussions and bringing new issues to the G20 table. This has been done either by the BRICS as a group or by one of the BRICS countries, with varying support from the others. Arguably, the issue of IMF reforms and representativeness has seen a rather united BRICS front that successfully pushed the issue on the agenda, and kept it up, resulting in actual changes. Reforming the reserve currency system may conceivably prove to be a similar case. Although here it is still too early to tell, as the BRICS countries only recently adopted a stronger common position on it and the issue has so far not figured prominently on the G20 agenda.

The BRICS countries have also been moderately successful in shifting the terms of the debate on some key issues, most clearly in the case of capital controls. The IMF has first come to accept some capital controls in principle, and more recently its proposal to address the issue has been challenged effectively by the BRICS.

Finally, the BRICS countries, while not always acting as a coherent political bloc, may still be able to effectively block initiatives as an ad hoc bloc formation, when the countries' interests align. The clearest example is the outcome of the Copenhagen climate negotiations. This development points to a sort of *de facto* veto – it is increasingly hard to achieve results unless the BRICS are on board. On global challenges, the BRICS-in-G20 platform then hands India, Brazil and South Africa some measure of veto power that they otherwise lack, due to not having permanent United Nations Security Council seats.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ While India has highlighted a per capita approach, China and Brazil favour historical emission trajectories. South Africa's position has been somewhere in between these approaches.

1.5 PERCEPTIONS

A common belief in Europe is that non-Europeans' perceptions towards the EU and Europe are positive. However, a quite sobering view is offered by the 2011 PEW Global Attitudes Survey, which brings together the results of worldwide public opinion surveys.⁵⁵ Although one should be carefully with drawing conclusions since the scope of the PEW research was only limited to a period of two years, some results of the survey are worth to be mentioned. The survey demonstrates **a worldwide decline of the overall image of the EU between 2010 and 2011, which is also reflected in the opinion polls in the BRIC countries** (South Africa was not among the nations surveyed by the PEW Research Center).

Table 7: Views of the EU in the BRIC countries (in percentage of favourability)

	Brazil	Russia	India	China
2010	55	69	X	47
2011	47	64	23	32

Source: PEW Research Center Global Attitudes Project (2011: 61-63)

As Table 7 indicates, positive perceptions are the highest in EU neighbour Russia, with 64% of the participating people in the PEW Survey favourable to the EU in 2011. Significantly lower, however, were the scores in China and India. With a measured score of percentage favourable towards the EU of 47% in 2010 and 32% in 2011, the ratings significantly dropped over the last year. Remarkably, the Indians rate the EU even lower with a score of only 23% for 2011.⁵⁶ Furthermore, in all these countries there is a decline in favourability in the 2010–2011 period.

The sobering findings of the PEW Research Center scholars are confirmed by scholarly work on the external perceptions on the EU. In their analysis of EU relations with the IBSA countries, Olivier and Fioramonti underline that several disputes resulted in a less favourable image of the EU: '[a]gricultural subsidies, non-tariff barriers and other protectionist measures against emerging economies of the "global south" contribute to reinforcing the perception of the EU as a neo-colonial power'.⁵⁷ Fioramonti and Lucarelli note that the EU is perceived by both China and Russia as rather weak in the field of international politics.⁵⁸ These findings can be seen as a confirmation of previous conclusions by Lucarelli that 'the external image of the EU is not one of great distinctiveness'.⁵⁹ Worrying for the EU is also the gap which Fioramonti and Poletti noticed between the EU's self-perception as a positive normative power and the way it is perceived by third countries. The EU as a global actor determined by its core values of democracy, human rights, solidarity, sustainable development and the rule of law 'is belied by the common perceptions of the leading nations of the global South', i.e. Brazil, India and South Africa.⁶⁰

This gap in perception of the EU is formulated even more sharply by non-European observers, who regularly lament the EU's inability to adapt to the changing world context and to adopt a more modest attitude towards the rest of the world. Sharpest in his criticism against Europe and the West in general is Kishore Mahbubani, an influential Asian public intellectual, former Singaporean

⁵⁵ PEW Research Center, 2011: 61-63.

⁵⁶ For India there was no data available for the year 2010.

⁵⁷ Olivier and Fioramonti, 2010: 220.

⁵⁸ Fioramonti and Lucarelli, 2010: 219.

⁵⁹ Lucarelli, 2007.

⁶⁰ Fioramonti and Poletti, 2008: 178.

diplomat and author of *The New Asian Hemisphere. The Irresistible Shift of Global Power*.⁶¹ In a recent contribution to 'Europe's World' he emphasises that '[t]he biggest strategic flaw in the EU's policies towards Asia is the assumption that these policies can continue on autopilot, even when the world is changing rapidly and Asia keeps rising so steadily'. He also criticizes the EU's misplaced smugness and advises the EU that '[a]ll hints of arrogance and condescension should be scrubbed out of its strategy documents', as the EU could also learn lessons from Asia.⁶² He also points to what he considers as Europe's main strategic errors: 'to remain obsessed with the transatlantic relationship' and 'to ignore its No. 1 strategic opportunity: Asia'. Or, as he continues, '[i]f Europe could think and act strategically, it would be busy knocking on Asian doors', but this exactly what is not happening.⁶³ In the next part, we assess in more detail the EU's strategic partnerships with the five BRICS countries.

⁶¹ Mahubani, 2008.

⁶² Mahubani 2011: 12-14.

⁶³ Mahubani, 2010.

2. THE IMPACT OF THE BRICS COUNTRIES' EMERGENCE ON THEIR STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE EU

2.1 ORIGINS AND TRAJECTORIES OF EU STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE BRICS

The notion of EU strategic partnerships is and remains an amorphous concept in EU external relations. The groundwork for the EU's strategic partnerships with the BRICS was laid in the various agreements and partnerships that emerged since the mid-1990s, with the wording appearing for the first time in the context of EU-Russia relations in 1998.⁶⁴ Cooperation agreements signed between the EU and the country in question form the legal basis for the relationships. The EU has a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia signed in 1994 (which took effect in 1997), that expired in 2007 but which has been extended on an annual basis after that. EU-India relations are built on the basis of a Cooperation Agreement from 1994, while the EU-China relationship legally is still governed by the 1985 Trade and Cooperation Agreement. With Brazil the EU has a framework cooperation agreement from 1992 and with South Africa it maintains a Trade and Development Cooperation Agreement from 1999. By the early years of the new millennium, some of the relationships were in clear need of an upgrade, made more urgent by the geopolitical climate at the turn of the century.⁶⁵

The final push to formalise these relations into 'strategic partnerships' came from the European Security Strategy (ESS) of 2003. In the ESS, six major countries were recognised as important partners for the EU. Amongst the BRICS, the document, drafted by High Representative Javier Solana's office, emphasised the need for closer relations with Russia and urged the EU to develop strategic partnerships also with China and India, while no mention was made of Brazil and South Africa.⁶⁶ Subsequently, strategic partnerships were established with China, Russia and India during summits in 2003–04.⁶⁷ To these were added strategic partnerships with Brazil and South Africa concluded in 2007, at summits in May (South Africa) and July (Brazil). Currently, the EU already has ten strategic partnerships, including also with Canada, Japan, Korea and Mexico.⁶⁸

While the background of the EU's prior relationships with the first batch of BRICS partners differed, **a common context was the international uproar against the Iraq war and the perceived unilateralism of the United States.** Especially in the cases of China and Russia, developing stronger ties with the EU can be seen as a means to counterbalance US unilateralism. The introduction of the ESS contained veiled criticism of US unilateralism:

*The United States has played a critical role in European integration and European security, in particular through NATO. The end of the Cold War has left the United States in a dominant position as a military actor. However, no single country is able to tackle today's complex problems on its own.*⁶⁹

This statement points toward an important initial motivating factor for the BRICS to join these partnerships. In all five cases, it is probably safe to conclude that governments saw value in promoting a

⁶⁴ European External Action Service country pages Brazil, China, India, Russia and South Africa.

⁶⁵ Keukeleire and Bruyninckx, 2011: 386–389; Keukeleire and MacNaughtan, 2008: 315–322.

⁶⁶ ESS, 2003: 14. Different key actors may have been behind the inclusion of these particular countries in the ESS. While Javier Solana was personally active in including China, scholars have suggested that Chris Patten was behind the Commission's decision to give greater priority to India. Jain, 2009: 174.

⁶⁷ With Russia at the summit in St. Petersburg in May 2003, with China in the October 2003 summit in Beijing, and with India at the summit in the Hague in 2004.

⁶⁸ See Renard, 2011a.

⁶⁹ ESS, 2003: 1.

multipolar vision of the world in which they themselves constituted one of these 'poles'. **By concluding strategic partnerships with these countries, the EU was then offering symbolic recognition of their importance in the global system, i.e., of their Great Power status.**

However, this also sowed the seeds for later disappointments and disillusionment with the strategic partnerships. While most of the BRICS craved recognition of the multipolar nature of international relations, EU policy-makers intended to 'multilateralise multipolarism'. Then, as now, the EU perceived itself as a 'model-power'.⁷⁰ At the historic moment of 2003 that saw unprecedented rifts in the North Atlantic Community, the EU's catchphrase 'effective multilateralism' for a moment appeared to dovetail with the need of the BRICS countries for greater international recognition.

There was then both a push and a pull factor involved. The EU was actively striving for strategic partnerships with China, India and Russia, while these countries' themselves saw it as desirably to strengthen ties with the EU, or at least with Europe. It was only at the turn of the millennium that India's potential and importance was fully realized in Brussels and in the EU capitals.⁷¹ In this respect, Europe's Asia Strategy of the late 1990s was important in raising India's profile in Brussels. In the case of South Africa, the 'pull factor' seems to have been relatively more important than in the other cases, with President Mbeki actively seeking stronger ties with the EU.

Added impetus for closer cooperation came from a mutual desire to achieve concrete progress on key issues. Brazil was keen on receiving support for its bid to gain a seat on the UN Security Council, while Portugal during its EU presidency actively sought to improve European trade ties with Brazil due to the stalled trade negotiations between the EU and Mercosur. China, for its part, was keen on securing early market economy status and a lifting of the arms embargo, while the EU was seeking improvements in markets access and stronger IPR protection for European companies operating in China. Similar push and pull factors played in favour of closer relations with the remaining BRICS.

No clear definition of the elusive term 'strategic partnership' is to be found anywhere in official documents. In a 2004 interview for Chinese media, Javier Solana admitted this much.⁷² It appears that the two terms of concept – what is strategic and what is a partnership – were left unclear on purpose. Scholars commonly lament this lack of clarity on what the concept signifies,⁷³ which is made even more confusing by the fact that some major countries are themselves fond of using the term to denote their own relationships with other key countries. Notably, China has expended much rhetorical effort and high-level summitry in establishing partnerships with dozens of major countries on all continents, as well as with regional groupings, including separately with a number of EU member states.⁷⁴ Thus, the term strategic partnership has continued to lead a somewhat awkward life in EU diplomatic parlance and documents. Unsurprisingly, the concept has remained 'unknown to most people – including EU officials', at least until the September 2010 European Council.⁷⁵ Indirectly, it can be deduced that strategic partnership merely signifies a closer and deeper relationship between the EU and a non-EU country.

The adoption of the Lisbon Treaty seems to have served as a catalyst for a review of these relationships. With the appointment of a President of the European Council (Herman van Rompuy), the job of representing the EU at the annual partnership summits ceased to be a competence of the rotating EU

⁷⁰ Jokela, 2009: 41.

⁷¹ Kapila, 2008.

⁷² Javier Solana interview, 2004.

⁷³ See e.g. Mattlin, 2009; Grevi, 2010.

⁷⁴ Mattlin, 2009: 115.

⁷⁵ Renard, 2011a: 1.

Presidency. Van Rompuy seized this opportunity by announcing in his first major foreign policy speech in February 2010 that ‘we need to review and strengthen our relationship with key partners. I am above all thinking about the United States, Canada, Russia, China, Japan, India, and Brazil.’⁷⁶ Later that year, Van Rompuy followed his announcement by calling for an extraordinary European Council meeting on 16 September 2010 to deal with these partnerships.

At the European Council meeting of September 2010, the EU’s High Representative Catherine Ashton was tasked to ‘evaluate the prospects of relations with all strategic partners, and set out in particular our interests and possible leverage to achieve them’ in coordination with the European Commission and the Foreign Affairs Council.⁷⁷ The European Council also established a definitive list of nine strategic partners (to which a tenth was later added) and called for greater internal coordination between the EU and the member states in their relationship with these countries. It should be noted that in some cases, there is, as yet, not much more than an expressed desire for closer partnership. In December 2010, Catherine Ashton presented her first progress report on the EU’s strategic partnerships with the US, Russia and China, implicitly suggesting an informal ‘pecking order’ amongst these partnerships.

The first progress report confirmed the focus of the partnerships on promoting the EU’s vision of ‘effective multilateralism’ and on greater coordination in multilateral forums. The progress report also suggested revising these partnerships by identifying common elements, as well as specific priorities and objectives for each of the partners. Based on these, linkages and trade-offs between different issues areas were meant to be established in order to provide the EU with greater ‘bargaining power’. However, Catherine Ashton’s failed attempt to revive the discussion on China’s arms embargo as a possible bargaining chip demonstrated the practical difficulties in this regard. The presentation of the second progress report on the EU’s relationship with India, Brazil and South Africa at the informal foreign affairs Council meeting on 2 September 2011 in Sopot, suffered from a lack of attention, due to the Libya and Eurozone crises, with little news emerging on the issue at hand.

Overall, the review process can be regarded as an attempt to tackle the inconsistency and apparent ineffectiveness of the strategic partnerships. **So far, however, the review process seems to have led to few results. Last year’s annual summits with China and the US are widely regarded as having been failures. And with progress reports on the last four partnerships still outstanding, there is no clear sign yet on what the outcome of the review will be.** Catherine Ashton for her part has stated that her motto for the current reflection is: ‘fewer priorities, greater coherence and more results’.⁷⁸ Whether this is feasible remains to be seen.

2.2 CURRENT STATE OF EU’S STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE BRICS

In this section, we examine four areas of the relationships that we deem as particularly crucial: institutionalising the relationship, perceived value of the partnership, security relations, as well as concrete progress and sticking points.

Institutionalising the relationship. Although the EU’s strategic partnerships usually contain common institutional features, e.g. annual summits and joint action plans that outline a medium-term vision for the relationship, **these partnerships are not alike. In some instances they contain notable**

⁷⁶ Van Rompuy speech at College of Europe, 25 February 2010

⁷⁷ European Council Conclusions, 2010.

⁷⁸ Renard, 2011b.

differences and they can be seen as ‘neither identical nor equal’⁷⁹ (see Table 8 for a systematic comparison of the partnerships). This is particularly true for the five BRICS countries. For example, the EU and China do not have an overall Joint Action Plan (JAP) for their strategic partnership, only a very specific JAP for the EU-China Year of Youth 2011. In contrast, there are no less than seven JAPs in EU-Russia relations. Also, the EU conducts annual summits with a broader set of actors, beyond its strategic partners.

Overall, the EU-Russia relationship appears to contain the most ‘special arrangements’: summits are held biannually, instead of annually; instead of one overall JAP for the partnership, the relationship is structured into four ‘common spaces’ with their own road maps (JAPs); Russia was the first to conclude a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, although that agreement has now expired and is extended on an annual basis; finally, Russia, unlike the others, does not receive EU development aid.

If institutionalisation of the relationship is one way to gauge its strength, then the picture is rather mixed. The EU and China have, for example, had drawn-out negotiations on a Political and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) that would take the place of the old Trade Agreement from 1985. While the EU’s demand for a standard ‘democracy and human rights’ clause is unpalatable to China, market-related issues have been just as tricky. The Russian PCA has been in limbo since 2007 when it expired. The PCA has been extended annually, pending Russian WTO entry. A major impediment to closer EU-Brazil relations has been the stalled EU-Mercosur negotiations. Concluding the EU-Mercosur FTA would open up the prospect for enhanced economic cooperation and, through that, a deepening of EU-Brazil relations at all levels.

Intriguingly, it appears that the most recent of the strategic partnerships with the BRICS (South Africa) is also the most institutionalised one. Unlike the others, EU-South Africa are already long in the process of implementing a free trade agreement; the two sides maintain a regular security dialogue at the COPS-level (Political and Security Committee); South Africa has participated in an EU-led peacekeeping operation (Operation Artemis) and South Africa is also by far the biggest recipient of development aid.

The perceived value of partnership. Relative power has shifted to quite an extraordinary extent over the past decade. The BRICS countries initially saw it as desirable to strive for the EU’s recognition of their status as ‘poles’ in a multipolar world. A few years back, EU symbolic recognition clearly still mattered. **Now it is increasingly the case that BRICS countries are reluctant to recognise the EU as ‘a player’ or ‘stakeholder’ at all on many issues. Even worse, if the EU’s original idea was to coax the BRICS countries into its own framework of effective multilateralism, it has increasingly been forced to play ball with the game-rules preferred by the BRICS,** taken straight from the sovereignty playbook.⁸⁰

It appears that expectations towards the strategic partnership have played an important role in how the BRICS countries now view these partnerships. While India, for example, seemed to adopt a rather cavalier attitude toward the whole partnership from the start,⁸¹ Indian views of EU-India relations have become more positive of late. EU-China relations have seen the opposite trajectory. While there were high hopes for stronger relations in the beginning of the strategic partnership, EU-China relations have progressively worsened ever since. Recently, it has even been argued that China no longer even wants a strategic partnership with Europe.⁸² EU-Russia relations have followed a somewhat similar trajectory. In

⁷⁹ Renard, 2011a: 22.

⁸⁰ Holslag, 2010: 15–16.

⁸¹ Jain, 2009.

⁸² Godement and Parello-Plesner, 2011: 2.

any case, Russia considers that its relationship with the EU in many ways is different from the others, given its geographical proximity, strong historical ties to Europe and its character as a former superpower rather than an emerging power. South Africa has been keener on the partnership with the EU. South Africa is also the BRICS that is most clearly a middle-ranking power, rather than a major power.

Security relations. Security is one area where EU-BRICS cooperation is particularly thin. For example, of the 24 agreements between the EU and the BRICS countries between 2003 and 2010, only three are related to security.⁸³ **For all the rhetoric of strategic partnerships, there is very little that is strategic about these relationships in the traditional sense.** While security issues are occasionally discussed between the EU and the BRICS, the dialogue tends to be on a general level (regional security, terrorism etc), with little concrete resulting from it, let alone joint actions.⁸⁴ So far, only South Africa and Russia have had limited participation in EU peacekeeping missions, both in Africa. This is then a far cry from the relationship between the EU and the US/NATO, with NATO de facto often complementing the EU missions or the EU taking over some of the NATO operations (as has been the case in the Balkans).

The limits to closer security cooperation between the EU and the BRICS have been perhaps most evident in the case of China. The short-lived 'honeymoon' enjoyed by the EU and China in 2003–04 coincided with a strong push by some of the bigger member states for lifting the arms embargo on China. After this endeavour was torpedoed by strong opposition from the United States and Japan,⁸⁵ EU-China relations have been on a deteriorating track. On the other hand, the BRICS, in particular China, Russia and India do not even regard the EU as a real security actor outside of Europe. They are willing to discuss specific areas of broader security, such as terrorism with appropriate officials in the EU (India, for example, has been active in this respect). But when it comes to matters of hard security, the BRICS countries are, with the exception of South Africa, quite happy to keep the EU out of their respective spheres of influence.

Concrete progress and sticking points. A considerable number of specific agreements have been agreed upon between the EU and the BRICS countries.⁸⁶ For example, with India the EU has a joint work programme on climate change, and on clean development and energy, and the two sides are in negotiation on a FTA. With Brazil, the EU has concluded agreements on aviation safety and open skies, in addition to which the Euratom and Brazil cooperate in the field of fusion energy research. A visa waiver program is also in place. With South Africa one could mention the COST (Cooperation in Science and Technology) partnership, ERASMUS Mundus, as well as a Trade Development and Cooperation Agreement Support Facility. Admittedly, these agreements would most likely have come about also without the rhetorical strategic partnership.

Despite these concrete achievements, in the case of the EU's strategic partnerships with the BRICS, there have been many failures and lost opportunities to 'operationalise' the strategic partnerships. For various reasons, the EU has not been able to deliver what its partners have most cared about. A case in point is the issue of permanent United Nations Security Council (UNSC) membership. While several individual EU member states have supported the inclusion of India, Brazil

⁸³ Cf. Holslag, 2010: 4.

⁸⁴ Ibid: 6–14.

⁸⁵ Archik et al., 2006: 26–28.

⁸⁶ Holslag, 2010: 4.

and South Africa in the UNSC,⁸⁷ other EU member states – most notably Italy – has been against it, and Germany, Russia and Canada also have voiced reservations on UNSC enlargement.⁸⁸

In many cases, the partnership has become bogged down in a deadlock on contentious issues (see Table 8). The BRICS countries often let it be known that EU intransigence on granting them ‘status victories’ is a clear signal that the EU is not serious about wanting a true strategic partnership. For example, the Chinese Premier was reportedly incensed of the lack of progress on the arms embargo and market economy status (MES) issues in the 2010 EU-China summit to the point where the whole summit almost ended in a disaster due to this. Recently, with growing calls for China to buy bonds and invest in troubled European countries, the Chinese Premier bluntly stated that China will consider this only after the EU shows its sincerity by granting Market Economy Status ahead of 2016, when China will get it anyway, as part of the WTO deal.⁸⁹ Similarly, the EU-Brazil relationship has become bogged down due to the EU’s deadlocked trade negotiations with Mercosur.

2.3 NEW ARCHITECTURE FOR EU STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE BRICS

‘Until now, we have strategic partners, now we also need a strategy’

(Herman van Rompuy, 14 September 2010)⁹⁰

There now is a broad consensus amongst both policy-makers and the academic community that the unfocused and seemingly arbitrary way in which the EU engages with its strategic partners is in need of an overhaul. While there is some debate on whether the lack of conceptual clarity of these partnerships is actually an underlying strength or a weakness of the concept, most would agree that their effectiveness as a tool for EU external action remains questionable. At a bilateral level, the list of concrete achievements of these partnerships remains notably low. More worryingly even is the fact that at the multilateral level, these partnerships seem to have failed to promote the EU’s vision of international affairs.

In Copenhagen, the BASIC countries banded together with the US to leave the EU out in the cold in the climate change talks. In 2010, significantly, six out of the nine ‘strategic partners’ of the EU voted against upgrading the EU’s status in the UN General Assembly. And at the IMF, the BRICS have blocked a European proposal on capital controls. Moreover, beyond these anecdotal examples, **there is little to suggest that the strategic partnerships have promoted a shared understanding of international affairs, greater appreciation of the EU, or even a common vision for global governance with the BRICS countries,** as was pointed out in the first part of this report.

In short, the EU partnerships reflect a political reality where the EU has not succeeded in establishing true strategic partnerships with the BRICS countries and where the EU itself is also perceived as ‘the weak end of the strategic partnerships’.⁹¹ Even worse, some of the so-called strategic partners have caused divisions between EU member states rather than contributing to intensified cooperation in order to tackle global issues.⁹²

⁸⁷ In 2008, France and the UK issued a joint declaration in support for the inclusion of Germany, India, Japan and Brazil as permanent members as well as a permanent representation for the African continent.

⁸⁸ Cf. Keukeleire and Bruyninckx, 2011: 398.

⁸⁹ *Financial Times*, 14.9.2011.

⁹⁰ European Council, 2010.

⁹¹ Renard and Hooijmaaijers, 2011: 6.

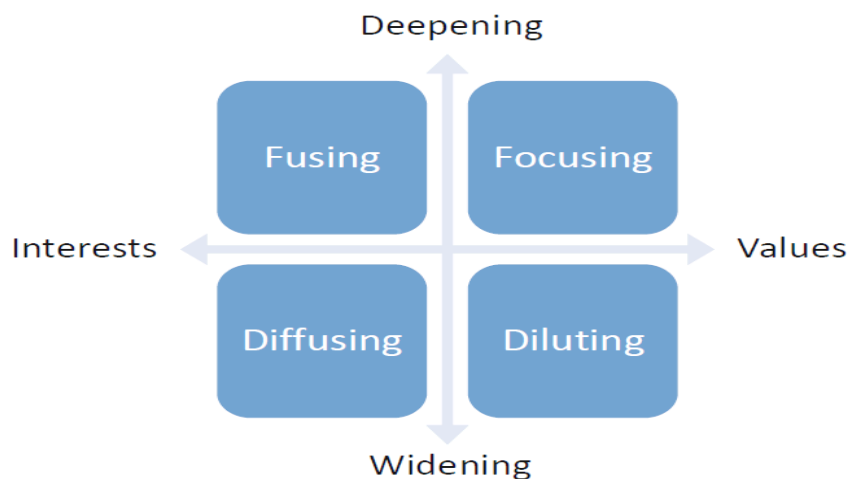
⁹² See e.g. Fox and Godement, 2009; Leonard and Popescu, 2007.

Realising the shortcomings of the strategic partnerships, both as a concept and as a tool for EU external action, in September 2010 the European Council asked EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton to 'evaluate the prospects of relations with all strategic partners, and set out in particular our interests and possible leverage to achieve them'.⁹³ With two progress reports having been issued by the High Representative in 2010/2011 and a third one outstanding, the time has now come to think about the future architecture of these relationships.

Below, we identify **four potential options for the EU to further develop the strategic partnerships as a policy tool**. These derive from the assumption that there are two potential ways for the EU to further develop these partnerships. First, the EU can either decide to further deepen its engagement with a core group of major powers amongst its already existing strategic partners, or broaden the strategic partnership concept to engage a much wider set of middling powers.⁹⁴ Second, the EU can choose to start using these partnerships in order to address more narrowly defined bilateral issues of common concern (and with that drop its focus on 'effective multilateralism'), or it can attempt to focus these partnerships on addressing global governance issues and promoting its vision of 'effective multilateralism.'

Given these two potential ways of developing the strategic partnerships, the options available to the EU seem to derive from a combination of a 'deepening-widening' continuum and an 'interests-values' continuum. Of course, the resulting options represent 'ideal types', which are nevertheless indicative of the different directions in which the EU can develop the strategic partnership concept in the foreseeable future. Ultimately, of course, the strategic partnerships are jointly negotiated between the EU and its partners and will continue to contain an element of ad-hocism so that a 'pick-and-choose' outcome remains the most likely for the time being. However, framing the EU's options in these broad categories might encourage a greater strategic thinking about the broader means and ends the EU pursues with these partnerships in the first place.

Figure 2: Simplified Matrix of EU Options



Fusing would indicate that the EU should develop deeper relations with a core group of 'major powers' on the basis of their geo-strategic importance and the EU's economic and political dependence on

⁹³ European Council Conclusions, 2010.

⁹⁴ Gratius, 2011.

these countries. Most likely that would mean creating a 'special relationship' with some of the BRICS (most likely China and Russia) on a more strategic and political level. Eventually, this kind of relationship might come to reflect on the EU's current relationship with the United States, as these countries further gain in importance and as the EU's dependence on these countries increases. Given the EU's evident inability to convince these countries of the benefits of its vision of 'effective multilateralism', this would mean that the EU would have to accept the reality of a more multipolar world, by fusing its vision of international affairs with their views of the international system. Fusing would most likely involve a trade-off on such issues as the Chinese arms embargo or Russia's right to intervene in its neighbourhood in order for the EU to gain reassurances on issues of its own interests (energy, international finance, etc). Doing so, of course, might risk damaging relations with some of its established partners, like the USA.

Focusing would also indicate that the EU should develop deeper relations with a core group of major powers, but this deepening would be based on a shared vision of international affairs and values, rather than the EU's 'geo-strategic' interests. This could imply engaging in a closer relationship with the IBSA countries, which at times tend to have a different view of international affairs than China and Russia. Like the EU, these countries are also democracies. This option would likely have to involve acknowledging IBSA countries as regional powers and giving in on a number of trade-related issues that are amongst their primary concerns. The EU might also have something to offer to these countries on a strategic level, given that they play in a very different league than Russia and China. In a best case scenario, a deepening of relations with some of these would allow for a competitive dynamic, where other countries would like to emulate the new status and advantages the EU bestows on the IBSA countries.

Diffusing would indicate a widening of the strategic partnerships to new middling powers such as Indonesia, Turkey, Nigeria, Argentina, Egypt and Pakistan that are becoming important regional actors and would reflect the EU's adoption of a strategic partnership with South Korea. The focus in this case would be mostly on bilateral interests and would not seek to impose the EU's values and global vision on these actors. The EU's engagement in this case would be partly aimed at checking the growing influence of the BRICS with these new players and would build on the fact that in some cases these new players are in direct competition with the BRICS for regional influence and status (Pakistan-India, Brazil-Argentina, etc). This could be potentially damaging for relations with some of the BRICS, who would see the relative value of their strategic partnerships drop even further. It would also further dilute the concept of strategic partnerships and risks causing a 'death by summits' scenario for an already overloaded EU bureaucracy.

Diluting would, similar to broadening, indicate a widening of strategic partnerships to a new group of key countries. However, instead of choosing these countries on the basis of their future political and economic potential and in order to check the growing regional reach of the BRICS, this would be done on the basis of their congruence with Europe's vision of 'effective multilateralism' and would be based on promoting European ideas on governance and human rights. Moreover, these new strategic partnerships would mainly address global governance issues, rather than issues of bilateral concern. This could be done through, for example, more regular meetings on climate change issues with like-minded countries or coordination meetings before G20 summits. The primary aim would be to dilute the influence of the BRICS on global governance by mimicking their proliferation of new regional, multilateral and bilateral forums.

As has been pointed out, these categories are of course ideal types. Most likely, 'ad-hocism' will continue to be the main trend determining the way these partnerships develop. However, **for the EU to start developing a grand strategy of how to employ these partnerships, thinking along the lines**

of these different categories pointed out in the above might be useful. Above all, they demonstrate the real trade-offs of choosing one option over another. By binding itself closer to the BRICS with an emphasis on Russia and China, the EU's multilateral vision is likely to be diluted. By choosing to emphasise its global vision and values and focusing on a different group of actors, maintaining close relations with some of the BRICS might be complicated etc. Realising these trade-offs is a necessary element of developing a new strategy and understanding as the EU seeks to further develop its strategic partnerships.

3. THE CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: BEYOND EUROPEAN MYOPIA

This study on the EU foreign policy towards the BRICS argues that **the BRICS countries do not form a bloc and should thus not be approached by the EU as a coherent bloc, but rather as an increasingly dense and influential network which, together with other overlapping multilateral settings, has a growing impact on international political and economic governance.** The impact of the BRICS countries on the EU can only be correctly understood if it is seen as **part of a wider shift in the international balance of power**, both politically and economically.

This leads to a first major recommendation for the EU, which psychologically may also be the most difficult: the European population and European politicians have to **adapt to a world order in which Western countries do not systematically dominate anymore, but which is characterized by an 'irresistible shift of global power to the East' and to the South.**⁹⁵ This shift may be further accelerated if the Europeans prove to be unable to tackle their financial crisis. In this context, it is not in itself a problem that the EU has not developed a coherent 'BRICS policy'. More problematic is that the EU has no a policy to deal with the changing balance of power in the 21st century – a phenomenon in which the rise of the BRICS has to be situated.

This shift in the balance of power also has an impact on what the EU considers of crucial importance: 'effective multilateralism'. It may be useful to recognize that the BRICS countries and the other Asian or Southern countries have made a 'choice for multilateralism' too – just like the Europeans – but that it is **a choice for multilateralism based on different principles with regard to both contents and approach.** In terms of content, they prioritise economic growth and development, which can be linked to the reluctance of BRICS countries to let economic development be restricted by concerns in other policy domains that the Europeans consider important, such as environment or the EU's interpretation of human rights. In terms of approach, they have a preference for pure intergovernmentalism in which national sovereignty is fully respected, with decision-making by consensus, absence of treaty obligations and voluntary commitments. This is opposed to the European preference for legally binding commitments and powerful international organisations and regimes. This much becomes clear in the G20 in which the BRICS countries have had their biggest political relevance. Seen from the BRICS countries' vantage point, the function of the G20 is somewhat akin to the 19th century Concert of Europe, albeit on a global scale. It stresses a form of international power that places sovereign Great Powers at the centre of a power system that is much less institutionalised, less binding, and more ad hoc than what EU officials have in mind when talking of effective multilateralism.

This leads to the following policy recommendation: **the EU can continue to actively promote its own view of effective multilateralism, but should not take for granted that its preference for binding commitments and institutionalised regimes will be shared by other actors.** This implies that if the EU becomes aware that it is in danger of becoming marginalised in a specific negotiation context, it has to accept early enough that the discussions will be based on a different 'multilateralism paradigm' than the one preferred by the Europeans and that it has to pursue its interests and seek allies within this new context. The experience of the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit indicated that the EU should follow much more attentively the general negotiation dynamics and timely adapt its approach accordingly.

⁹⁵ Mahbubani, 2008.

Negotiations within the G20 and the Copenhagen Summit also indicate that on issues of global governance it is increasingly hard to achieve results unless the BRICS countries or at least some of them are on board. In view of the importance of global governance issues for the EU, this also implies that the EU has to engage more actively with the BRICS countries and other emerging states. In the climate change negotiations and in G20 negotiations (e.g. the reform of the Bretton Woods institutions, the regulation of cross-border capital flows, and improving the international reserve currency system) a certain coordination of strategies among the BRICS countries can indeed be discerned from their action. **Even if they are not always acting as a coherent bloc, they have an increasing impact, either in agenda setting or in shifting the terms of the debate, or because they manage to block proposals formulated by the EU or the West.**

A mixed assessment also follows from an analysis of the voting behaviour of the BRICS countries in the United Nations. **In the UN General Assembly, the BRICS countries cast identical votes in 56–63% of the resolutions voted upon. Significantly, they did not vote as a bloc on a considerable percentage of the resolutions.** Other variations of the BRICS format show higher scores in terms of voting cohesion, with the highest in rank being the IBSA format. If the EU is seeking support within the group of emerging powers, it may find a more coherent set of actors in the 'India – Brazil – South Africa' partnership than in the BRICS setting in general. Initially, this also looks more attractive to the EU, as these are democratic countries, perceived as sharing more clearly the EU's values and objectives. However, a closer look at the various foreign policy issues demonstrates that it is not self-evident to engage more actively with the IBSA countries, although the positions of particularly South Africa and Brazil are closer to the EU than those of China and Russia. **Yet, even South Africa, Brazil and India often consider the values 'respect for national sovereignty' and 'non-intervention' more important than what the EU considers as core values of its foreign policy: human rights and democracy.**

In this context, it does not help the EU's position that there clearly is a gap between the EU's self-perception as a positive normative power and the way it is perceived by third countries. This is also reflected in the findings of the PEW Global Attitudes Survey, which pointed to a **decline of the overall image of the EU in 2011, with less than half of the people who took part in the opinion poll in Brazil, China and India being favourable towards the EU.** This leads to another recommendation: the EU has to do major efforts to stop the decline of Europe's image in the world. And this will not be possible by merely launching a 'public diplomacy' campaign in which the EU and the EP emphasizes its own values, which may even have the opposite effect. Strengthening the EU's image in the world will require sustainable efforts to show to the elites and the population in the BRICS countries that the EU can be a relevant and useful power in solving issues of mutual concern.

The previous analysis also points to one of the reasons why the EU's 'strategic partnership' with the individual BRICS countries has been a failure. In general, these strategic partnerships did not contribute to substantially upgrading the relations with the increasingly important BRICS countries. Neither did they help to prepare the EU to the shifting balance of power to the South and the Asian-Pacific region. The EU has never managed to define what its 'strategic interests' are, why these partnerships are *strategic*, and what could be expected from such a partnership. Indeed, from the vantage point of many BRICS countries, it still appears that the only true strategic partnership of the EU is the North Atlantic partnership with the United States. However, **the predominant Atlantic strategic partnership of the 20th century will not be sufficient for the EU to pursue its interests in the new 21st century context.**

The European Council of September 2010 called for an evaluation of relations with the strategic partners. However, for the moment ambiguity remains about the nature of these partnerships and the real strategic priorities and choices of the EU. This study proposes **four theoretical options to develop**

a new architecture for the EU's strategic partnerships with the BRICS countries and further develop the concept of strategic partnerships as a policy tool. These options **centre around the concepts 'fusing', aimed mainly at Russia and China; 'focusing', aimed at the IBSA countries that at least on some issues are closer to the EU's positions; 'diffusing', aimed at widening the strategic partnerships to even more regional powers on the basis of bilateral interest; and 'diluting', aimed at widening them based on a shared view on effective multilateralism.**

The resulting options represent 'ideal types'. As the strategic partnerships are jointly negotiated between the EU and its partners, they will continue to contain an element of ad-hocism. However, framing the EU's options through these categories might encourage more strategic thinking about the broader means and ends the EU pursues with the partnerships. It will force the EU to think carefully about the diplomatic, economic and other trade-offs and implications of choosing a particular option (or combination of options), or alternatively deciding to continue the current ad-hoc approach. In practice, each option has advantages, but also serious disadvantages – not least with regard to Europe's traditional main strategic partner, the US.

Whatever option the EU would like to choose, the EU will have to **invest much more time and energy in negotiations and dialogues with its external partners, instead of focusing mainly on internal discussions and turf battles or on just repeating the same European messages without entering into a real interaction.** This may also become one of the tasks of the European Parliament, that is, to control whether the High Representative, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Union Delegations as well as its own Standing Committees and Interparliamentary Delegations to third countries and regions do spend sufficient time and energy in pursuing European interests through an intensive dialogue with third countries and groups of countries.

It is in the interest of the EU to convince the emerging new powers and multilateral frameworks that the EU remains a relevant power with which they share common interests, and that it understands the global shift of power. **If the EU wants to strengthen its ties with the BRICS countries, it has to pay more attention to their views, interests and approaches, and to some extent take these into account when formulating positions. Naturally, this only works as an implicit trade-off, with the BRICS country in turn taking on some of the EU's positions and interests.** This is also important in order to identify points of leverage and trade-offs, which can be essential to gain their support for EU objectives. In conclusion, the EU will have to be aware that by engaging in such trade-offs, it risks greater friction with some of its traditional allies, like the US. It would also imply diluting its more normative goals in international affairs.

What the dialogue between the EU and the individual BRICS countries should lead to is the identification of a limited number of strategic objectives which will be at the heart of their cooperation (either bilateral or in smaller settings such as the IBSA framework) and which will be translated into a concrete action plan. These can be strategic objectives that are genuinely shared by both the EU and the BRICS country. However, they can also be strategic objectives which are mainly (or only) important for either the EU or its BRICS partner, but with regard to which the EU and its BRIC partner accept the commitment to actively support each other in the pursuit of this strategic goal. The end result may be that the EU will have less general 'strategic partnerships' and less 'laundry list' like action plans, but will have entered in a concrete strategic partnership with one or more of its BRICS partners in order to realize concrete strategic goals.

While addressing these issues will be much more difficult – due to the differences between the EU and the BRICS countries – **the EU should start by strengthening its ability to engage the BRICS countries on global governance issues and to conduct multilateral problem solving.** In this regard,

there are a few practical steps that it could consider undertaking. To start with, it should upgrade its Delegations in these countries, especially with staff working on crisis management and other experts on global governance related issues (climate change, international finance etc) in order to engage in deeper, more focused regular dialogue. It may also want to streamline its dialogue on security issues and consider the exchange of liaison officers in certain areas in order to increase common understanding. This also requires that the staff in the Delegation to the various BRICS countries and in the relevant desks in the EEAS have an in-depth knowledge of and experience in these countries and speak the local languages. **At the same time, the EU needs to be realistic about its own limitations.** As has been pointed out before, 'strategic partnerships require unity of purpose, focus, sometimes hard bargaining, a flexible negotiating posture and always political authority. It is fair to say that today's pivotal countries, whether established or rising powers, question whether the EU is endowed with these attributes, except on some trade issues.'⁹⁶

It is clear that this is a much more complicated and daunting task than in the preceding context when the EU only had to take into account one or two powers (the US and sometimes Russia). It may force the EU to make some difficult choices and to face some genuine incompatibilities between the strategic interests of the EU and the BRICS countries, as well as between the strategic interests of some of the EU member states. However, it can also lead to new themes of strategic cooperation that are hitherto unexplored. In an increasingly multipolar and interconnected world, the EU may have to pursue its interests by developing a network of relations with new partners alongside its current alliance with the United States.

⁹⁶ Grevi, 2010: 8.

GLOSSARY

ADB	Asian Development Bank
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEAN+3	Association of Southeast Asian Nations + China, Japan and Korea
BASIC	Brazil, South Africa, India and China
BRIC	Brazil, Russia, India and China
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
COP	16th edition of Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
COPS	Political and Security Committee
COST	Cooperation in Science and Technology
EAS	East Asia Summit
ECB	European Central Bank
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ESS	European Security Strategy
EU	European Union
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
G7	The Group of Seven
G8	The Group of Eight
G20	The Group of Twenty
G77	The Group of Seventy-Seven
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HRC	Human Rights Council
IBSA	India, Brazil, South Africa
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
JAP	Joint Action Plan
MERCOSUR	Southern Common Market
MES	Market Economy Status
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NPT	Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
RIC	Russia, India and China
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation
SCO	Shanghai Co-operation Organization
SDR	Special Drawing Rights
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WTO	World Trade Organization

APPENDIX

Table 8: Comparing the EU's strategic partnerships with the BRICS countries

	Russia	China	India	Brazil	South Africa
Legal basis for relations (signed in)	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (1994) ^a	Trade and Cooperation Agreement (1985)	Cooperation Agreement (1994)	Framework Cooperation Agreement (1992)	Trade and Development Cooperation Agreement (1999)
Partnership launched in	2003	2003	2004	2007	2007
Annual summits started	1998 ^b	1998	2000	2007	2008
Joint action plan for the strategic partnership	yes ^c	no	yes	yes	yes
Participation in EU peacekeeping operations	EUFOR Tchad/RCA	-	-	-	Operation Artemis
Human rights dialogues	consultations	structured dialogue	local dialogue	local dialogue	local dialogue
Free trade agreement	no	no	under negotiation	under negotiation (EU-Mercosur)	progressively implemented (TDCA)
EU aid (2007–10 period)	-	€ 128 mn	€ 260 mn	€ 61 mn	€ 560 mn
Biggest sticking points for the BRICS country	energy security, visa freedom	arms embargo, market economy status	FTA	trade barriers on commodities (especially agricultural subsidies)	Economic Partnership Agreement, EU sanctions on Zimbabwe
Biggest sticking points for the EU	good governance and corruption in Russia, energy security, 'neighbourhood' stability	market access, IPR issues	political and security cooperation (e.g. maritime security and peacekeeping)	trade barriers on consumer goods and investment	visa facilitation

Notes: a. The PCA expired in 2007 and is now being extended on an annual basis. b. With Russia, summits are held biannually. c. EU-Russia cooperation is divided into four 'spaces', each with its own 'road map' (action plan).

Sources: European Commission website (main source), EU External Action report 2010, especially p. 21.

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