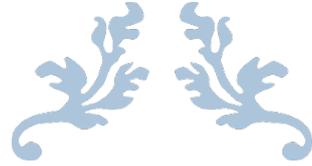


United or Divided We Stand? Perspectives on the EU's Challenges

Brussels, 9-10 May 2016

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**Evolution of the BRICS Institutionalization:
Challenges and Opportunities for the EU Strategic
Partnership with the BRICS**



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Title: Evolution of the BRICS Institutionalization: Challenges and Opportunities for the EU Strategic Partnership with the BRICS

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I Introduction

1.1 Empirical observation

Rising Pressures: The Evolution of the BRICS Institutionalization

With the rise of (re-)emerging powers and the shift of power from north to south and west to east, scholars and policymakers have spent decades examining emerging powers and envisaging the ongoing changing world order. As Pieterse (2011, 22) asserts, "...the rise of emerging societies is a major turn in globalization...North-South relations have been dominant for 200 years and now an East-South turn is taking shape. The 2008 economic crisis is part of a global rebalancing process." Against the backdrop of the 2008 financial crisis, **at the national level**, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries have been brought into the limelight. According to the official data released during the 7th BRICS Summit (Ufa 2015a, b), they have considerable economic clout (30% of the world's GDP), large population (42% of the world's population), and vast territories (26% of the world's landmass). As their economic muscles grow, they are seeking ways to translate their economic clout into greater influence in global governance via collective political action.

At the collective level, the acronym 'BRIC' was originally coined as a promising economic group by Jim O'Neil in 2001 (O'Neil 2001). In practice, interactions of the BRIC as a group started in 2005 when the BRIC's representation at the G7 Finance Ministers Meeting. In the context of global financial crisis, the first BRIC summit was held in 2009 in Yekaterinburg, Russia. Since then, the BRICS (South Africa joined in 2011) has been gradually transforming into a multi-level mechanism for building partnership among member states. Most recently, during the 7th BRICS Summit (Ufa, 8-9 July 2015), the BRICS has further deepened and expanded their cooperation, including new areas such as parliamentary affairs, culture, and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Through institutional building over a decade, on the one hand, the BRICS continually demands redistribution of the balance of authority in global governance, which means greater power in the western-led institutions in terms of representation (Chin 2015, 31; Kingah and Zwartjes 2015). **On the other hand**, it constantly reconciles heterogeneous genes and enhances intra-BRICS cooperation, culminating in the establishment of new institutions such as the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) with a view to (re-)shaping global governance. In so doing, the BRICS increasingly raises pressure on the global North and the Bretton Woods system. As the status quo power(s), the EU and its member states are inevitably influenced by the BRICS implicitly or explicitly, positively or negatively.

Insufficient Responses: the EU Strategic Partnerships towards the BRICS

Empirical evidence shows that, although the BRICS as a group achieved some degree of coherence and institutionalization, so far there has been a considerable gap between the ambitions and actions of the BRICS on the one hand, and the perceptions and reactions of mainstream western policymakers and scholars on the other hand.

The EU has launched 'strategic partnerships' with ten countries (Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, and the United States) for years. Each of

the BRICS countries is covered by a strategic partnership, but these cooperation instruments have basically failed thus far, despite untapped potential (D'Ambrogio 2014).

The rise of BRICS notwithstanding, the only report addressed BRICS on the EU level was “the EU foreign policy towards the BRICS and other emerging powers: objectives and strategies”, adopted by the European Parliament (EP) in January 2012 and called on the European External Action Service (EEAS) to establish an ad hoc coordination mechanism to ensure that all individual policies towards the BRICS are compatible from a systemic point of view (D'Ambrogio 2014). Followed up by Catherine Ashton (2012), the former EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, stated “as they start to come together, it is really important that we think about what it is that brings them together to form a common position. We need to find ways in which we can create a different dynamic and create common calls with some or all of them when that works.” Until now, instead of any genuine ‘BRICS policy’, the EU has been maintaining bilateral strategic partnerships to cope with the BRICS.

However, recent cases such as the Ukraine crisis, Syrian civil war, and the Copenhagen Climate Conference¹ have indicated the inefficiency of the EU's strategic partnership to gain support from the BRICS group on various issues. As the BRICS shares an aspiration to be “rule makers” instead of “rule takers” within global governance (Duggan 2015, 17), thereby creating mixed opportunities and challenges for the EU. In order to making sense of the strategic partnerships, this is an incentive for the Union to reassess the institutional evolution of the BRICS and reflect its strategy towards these countries strategically (D'Ambrogio 2014).

1.2 State of the Art: Divergent Views, Multifaceted Gaps

With the on-going emergence of the BRICS both as individual rising powers and as a political group on regional and global levels, more and more scholars have joined in the debate about its facts, functions, and future from various perspectives.

Drawing from a rich diversity of scholars' views in recent academic literature, several dominant discourses stand out. **Skeptics** tend to treat the BRICS as a broken bloc, emphasizing problems stemming from fragmented national interests, and therefore, it can hardly become a serious political organization (Nye 2013; Pant 2013, 91-105; Rushir 2012, 2-7; Francesca 2012). In contrast, **optimists** tend to regard the BRICS as a promising group, predicting that the BRICS can overcome inner differences to not only become a more important player in the existing world order but also to (re-)shape the order in an increasingly multipolar world (Gautier and Harmer 2014, 163-179; Mihaela 2014; Jayan 2012, 363-384). Taking an **in-between position**, some argue that the rise of the BRICS deserves serious attention but there is no need to overreact since the BRICS can hardly achieve sufficient coherence to match their ambitions (Kingah and Zwartjes 2015, 10-12; Armijo and Roberts 2014, 1-27; Frankenstein 2011, 187-195).

¹ Yet, at Paris Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 21) in 2015, the BRICS countries were not as sidelined the EU as they did at the Copenhagen Climate Conference in 2009.

But to be more convincing, these views need to be built on concrete empirical evidence of the BRICS interactions and explain its formation in a broader context. Within the existing literature, three important gaps can be identified.

Gap 1: Unsatisfactory Empirical Research

First of all, to a large extent, scholars draw data from BRICS official documents while scarcely explore other source of information. It is worth noting that, data triangulation is a useful tool that facilitates validation of data through cross-checking from two or more sources (McNabb 2015). Applying primary source such as in-depth interviews, documents from member states, press releases **etc., are helpful to justify** the analysis of BRICS issues. **Second**, most empirical research on BRICS focuses on economic and financial dimensions. However, in practice, the BRICS cooperation increasingly covers more issues, such as foreign policy, energy, climate, anti-drugs, youth affairs and so on. As Ban and Blyth (2013) noticed, although some scholars have scrutinized the BRICS' focus on foreign policy issues (Keukeleire and Hooijmaaijers, 2011, 2014; Laidi, 2012; Glosny, 2010), its role and ambitions in global governance (Stuenkel, 2015; Surender and Urbina-Ferretjans, 2014; Larionova 2012), its function as an emerging donor (Rowlands 2012), empirical research is lagging behind the intensifying BRICS interactions. **Additionally**, the analyses of the BRICS often elucidate it from a static, cross-sectional perspective, while overlook the dynamic process of its development. Therefore, unsatisfyingly, longitudinal knowledge of the BRICS is limited. **Overall**, as Gregory T. Chin (2015, 32) mentioned, much more primary field research is needed before we can offer definitive statements on the intentions and consequence of the BRICS as rising powers.

Gap 2: Inadequate Analysis of the BRICS as a group

The BRICS is often marginalized in the literature as in its totality. Compared with the rich literature focusing on bilateral or trilateral relations between or among individual BRICS countries by comparing data, national interests, advantages and problems etc. (Escher and Ye 2015, 1-30; **Pinheiro, Schwartzman and Pillay** 2015; Xu and Wang 2014, 503-511), the literature on the BRICS as a group is scarce. Yet, among the thin literature addressing the BRICS as a group, scholars mainly focus on the summit level (Duggan 2015, 17-20; Kirton 2015, 1-12). While some went further to combine the summit and ministerial levels (Larionova and Shelepov 2015, 40-45), there is hardly any literature offering a comprehensive multi-level (summit, ministerial, officials, forums, etc.,) analysis of the BRICS interactions.

Furthermore, on BRICS framework as a group, some scholars have given an introductory description (i.e. see Keukeleire and Hooijmaaijers 2014, 582-583; Armijo and Roberts 2014, 2; Zhu 2014, 61), outlining the main structure of the BRICS. For example, Duggan (2015, 22) highlighted “the BRICS have developed a large network of interactions and have institutionalized areas of cooperation”. Kirton John (2015, 4) emphasized: “the BRICS grew institutionally in its level, membership, agenda, interaction intensity and depth”. However, cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary scholarship to systematically treat the BRICS group as an open-ended process and analyze how it has evolved into the current framework as well as its broader implications would be highly desirable.

Gap 3: Insufficient EU-BRICS Strategic Partnership Research

The EU has launched Strategic Partnership (SP) as an instrument to represent a “global Europe” to an increasingly interdependent world. Along with its SP with individual BRICS countries for years, scholars have widely examined EU-Brazil/Russia/India/China/South Africa bilateral relations from various approaches. However, the on-going BRICS interactions push some analysts to ask if the BRICS should be addressed only individually or also as a group (Ujvari 2015; Gratius 2013, 2011). For instance, China is the most influential and indispensable participant of the BRICS, the prevalent view is to maintain a strong bilateral approach for EU-BRICS relations, few scholars tend to consider it necessary for the EU to reflect upon the most appropriate avenue by further engaging with China in the context of the EU-China Strategic Partnership through ‘minilateral’ and ‘plurilateral’ forms such as BRICS (Burnay, Wouters, Raube, et al. 2015). Regrettably, up to now there has been no further literature giving any explanation on how to do so. For a real “effective” multilateralism and a robust global Europe, rather than a passive response, groundbreaking research on the plausible ways to tackle the BRICS as a whole in certain policy fields is needed and significant.

1.3 The Article’s Objective, Research Questions and Rationale

Against the backdrop, the article aims at filling the three gaps identified above, especially the first two. To this end, **two research questions** are at the core of this article: how the interactions of the BRICS as a group have been evolving from the onset? What are implications of such evolution for EU-BRICS strategic partnerships?

To be clear, interactions of the BRICS in this article refer to all the activities that have been conducted under the rubric of BRICS bloc for the purposes of consultation, coordination, cooperation or collaboration. Through systematically tracing their interactions (meetings, sideline meetings, conferences, events, etc.), the trajectory of institutional evolution, shown by the steady expansion of the strands of policy, levels of engagement, frequency of meetings and types of outcomes, will emerge from the data.

Yet, it is necessary to take one step further to address the first research question. In order to capture in a more adequate fashion the trajectory of BRICS institutional evolution, it is helpful to create a set of indicators. According to Krasner (1988, 2009), institutionalization can be measured along two dimensions: breadth and depth. Over time, *ceteris paribus*—high degree of breadth and depth indicates high degree of institutionalization. In terms of breadth, this research considers as key indicators the number of interactions and the scope of issue-areas for breadth, and the levels of interactions and the extent of outputs for depth.

Here, the extent of outcomes is coded according to the nature of official documents published by the BRICS and the number of commitments made by the heads of state during the annual BRICS summit. By systematically collecting, coding and interpreting data, the evolution of BRICS as a group, the density of interactions on different dimensions, the framework of BRICS institutionalization will come to light. In so doing, the research aims to contribute to the ongoing debate on how and to what extent the BRICS interact as a group, specifically in which domains “mortar” has been generated thereafter, and how it is related to EU-BRICS strategic partnerships.

At this stage, it is essential to underline that the aim of this study is **two-pronged**: to map out the institutional evolution of BRICS as a group by delving into multiple sources for solid empirical evidence on the institutionalization of BRICS, and to explore its wider implications for the EU and its approach to the BRICS. Hence rather than offering a theoretical framework for expounding the causal dynamics of BRICS institutionalization, this article focuses on laying the empirical ground in an exploratory manner for future research in this field.

II. Methodology

The first question serves as an empirical foundation for the research, which requires a comprehensive chronological mapping of its evolution and a preliminary fact-gathering assessment of intra-BRICS interactions. To do so, the departure point of this research has been data collection. The ideal strategy of data collection is to exhaust primary and secondary data. But to make it feasible, the dataset is built by: 1) covering the ten-year period 2005-2016, 2) coding data from the most available and reliable sources, 3) applying the technique of data triangulation to facilitate validation of data through cross verification from the selected sources above.

The justification for such a decision is threefold. First, time span: according to all the sources available thus far, the first-ever interaction of the BRIC(S) countries as a political term was the BRIC's representation at the G7 Finance Ministers Meeting in 2005. While the 2016 Indian presidency is ongoing, the tentative agenda of meetings (May-December 2016) on the official website has already been included in the dataset. Therefore, interactions have been coded in a comprehensive manner from 2005 to 2016. Second, when inconsistency occurs between different sources, degree of data reliability is ranked in a descending order as: BRICS official websites, BRICS study centers, and secondary literature. Third, each interaction is coded by: date, location, theme, level of participants/dialogues, issue-areas, outcomes and source. I assembled data from six official BRICS websites, three BRICS study centers, and one book on the BRICS (see Appendix: overview of sources included in the dataset). Actually, this provides not only an overview of sources of this research, but also a brief map for searching information on BRICS as a group.

Based on the mapping exercise of BRICS interactions stretching over the past decade in the first dataset, the scope and depth of BRICS institutional evolution has been mapped out, as its contours gradually emerge from their interactions. Subsequently, a second dataset of a matrix of BRICS evolution has been created by timeline (horizontally), and by issue-areas and levels of participants/dialogues (vertically). As such, the study is able to calculate the number and frequency of interactions by year, sectors, and levels. Coupled with content analysis of 66 BRICS documents adopted at all levels (head of state/government, ministerial, sectoral, working group, etc.), the breadth and depth of BRICS cooperation also become evident.

III. Results and Discussion

3.1 Overall picture: trend of intensifying interactions on key indicators

The key question in this empirical section is how the interactions of the BRICS have been evolving as a group. Table 1, which presents the overall picture of BRICS interactions on key indicators within the entire dataset, shows that the interactions BRICS as a group have been intensified on both dimensions.

Table 1. Overview of the BRICS interactions on key indicators: 2005-2016

Overview of the BRICS on key indicators: 2005-2016 (Last updated on April 2016)					
Number of Year	Breadth		Depth		
	Interactions	Issue-areas	Levels	Documents	Commitments**
2005	1	1	1	0	0
2006	1	1	1	0	0
2007	1	1	1	0	0
2008	5	3	2	2	0
2009	9	9	3	3	16
2010	19	13	4	2	46
2011	31	18	6	8	38
2012	29	12	5	5	32
2013	46	10	5	6	47
2014	20	18	6	10	68
2015	119	23	6	27	83
2016	68*	N/A*	6	3	N/A*
In total	349	23	6	66	330

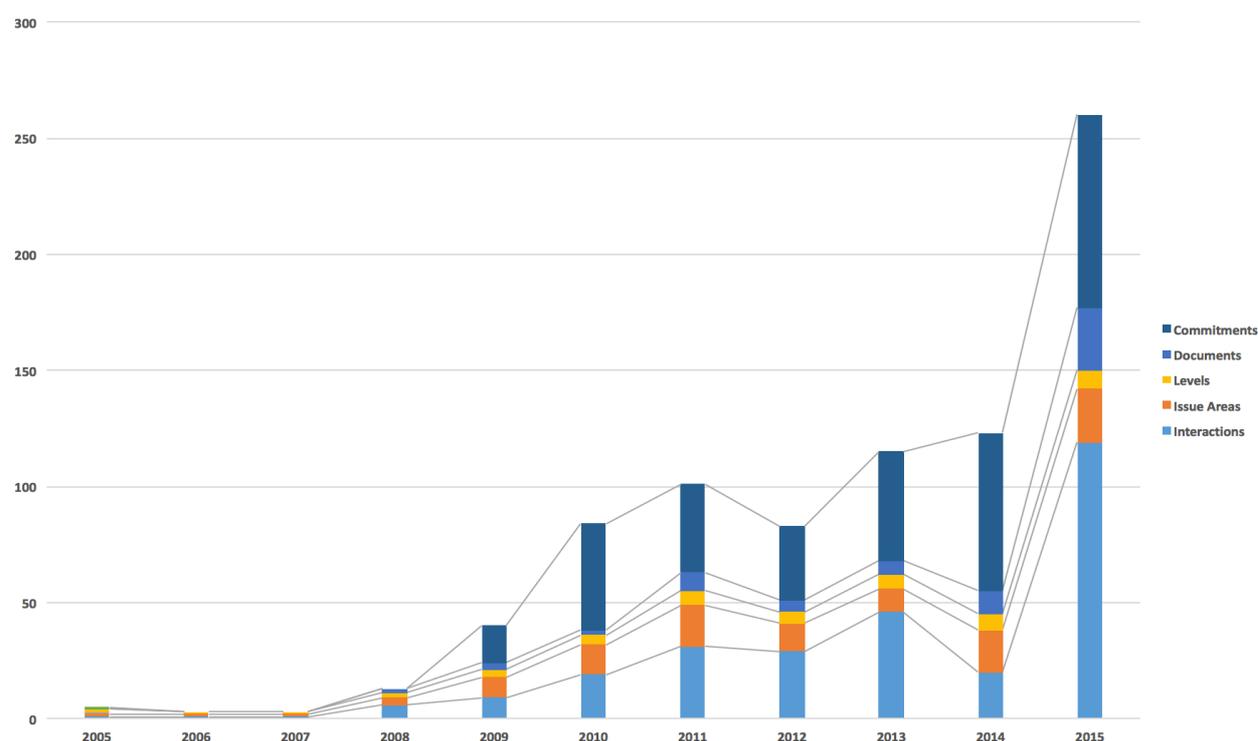
* N/A=not available yet. As the year of 2016 is on-going, the number of interactions will increase.

** Based on the number of commitments compiled by Toronto University's BRICS Information Centre (BRICS Research Group 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015)

As shown in Figure 1, the overall trend of BRICS interactions over the past decade is upward with the notable exception of 2012.² From 2005 to 2014, both the breadth and depth of the BRICS interaction have been rising steadily. The most visible change is 2015, which witnessed a considerable widening of interactions and deepening of engagements under the Russian presidency. In 2015 alone the number of interactions was more than two-thirds of the total number of interactions in the previous decade.

² The degree of data availability varies across time, which can lead to some limitations. I will illustrate this point in the next section.

Figure 1. Trend of BRICS interactions on key indicators throughout time



3.2 Detailed picture: interactions of BRICS

Under the overall picture of BRICS interactions there exists a more nuanced underlying picture of BRICS institutional evolution. This is related to the detailed data included in the dataset: the levels of participants involved in interactions and types of outcomes achieved in different issue-areas.

Table 2. Level of participants/dialogues of BRICS interactions: 2005-2016

Levels of Participants (2005-2016)													
	Levels	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
1	Heads of state/government				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Ministerial	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Sectoral						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Working group							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Local							✓			✓	✓	✓
6	Forum/Track II					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 2 shows the institutional level of BRICS interactions has increased from single channel into multi-channel over time. Through the expanding multi-level channels, BRICS' exchange of views, coordination of stances and cooperation on various issue-areas become more mature and routinely. Up to now, the BRICS framework consists six levels, and a certain hierarchy is shown within this format:

- 1) Heads of state/government meeting: annual Summits and meetings on the margins of G20 Summits
- 2) Ministerial meeting (18 ministries): foreign affairs; finance; security; agriculture and agrarian development; trade; health; education; science, culture, etc.
- 3) Sectoral meeting (25 agencies): national statistical authorities, science and technology, competition authorities, tax bureau, energy, health, customs, youth affairs, anti-drug, etc.
- 4) Working groups/experts meeting (18 working groups): agricultural cooperation, solid state lighting, anti-drug, anti-corruption cooperation, geospatial technology application for development, industry, cyber-security, environment, education, customs issues, etc.
- 5) Local level (2 meetings): meeting of mayors, meeting of the BRICS friendship cities and local governments cooperation forum
- 6) Forums/track II (36 forums): academic forum, business forum, financial forum, think tank forum, urbanization, economic think tank forum, civil forum, e-commerce, young scientists and entrepreneurs, BRICS parliamentary forum, etc.

Yet, the above expansion of BRICS cooperation on multi-levels is not convincing enough for the skeptics who regard the BRICS as no more than a “talk shop”. Hence, indicator of BRICS documentary outcomes is concluded in table 3. The numbers of outcomes on both types and issue-areas are ranked in a descending order.

Table 3. Number of Documents adopted by the BRICS on types and issue-areas³

Number of Documents on types and issue areas															
	Types Issues	(Joint) Declaration	(Joint) Communique	Action Plan	(Joint) Statement	Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)	Agreement	Strategy	Treaty	Handover Report	Annual Report	Working Procedures	Joint Publication	Executive Summary	In total
1	Miscellaneous*	5		5	2			1		1					14
2	Finance		4			1	3		1					1	10
3	Health	1	7												8
4	Agriculture	4		1								1			6
5	STI	3				1									4
6	Foreign		3												3
7	Trade	1	2												3
8	Education	1				1									2
9	Migration	2													2
10	Industry	1													1
11	Business										1				1
12	Labour and Employment	1													1
13	Economic							1							1
14	Competition				1										1
15	Environment				1										1
16	Statistics												1		1
17	Culture						1								1
18	Parliament				1										1
19	Civil				1										1
20	Youth			1											1
21	Website					1									1
22	Information	1													1
23	Revenue		1												1
	In total	20	17	7	6	4	4	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	66

*Miscellaneous: refers to documents which include variety of issue-areas, i.e. Declaration and Action Plan of each Summit.

As it turns out, the numbers and formality of documents varies considerably on different issue-areas. For instance, there is a big gap between the domain of finance and revenue. In the financial domain, there are 10 documents cover from high legally binding agreements and treaty to soft communique and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). While in terms of revenue, only one communique was issued. As shown in the table, rhetorically, the first five issue-areas are more productive than the rest. But it should be noted that, most of the rest domains are newly established, it remains an early stage to judge the last 10 issue-areas, no matter rhetorically or practically.

3.3 Three stages of BRICS institutional evolution

In order to capture the full picture of BRICS institutional evolution, coupled with the above preliminary results, I divide according to the empirical data the BRICS evolution into three main stages: embryonic, emerging and semi-institutionalization stage.

Embryonic stage (2005-2008): this is a rudimentary stage that set the tone for BRIC with potential for further development. Until 2005, as the BRIC's representatives attended and exchanged of views on the meeting of G7 finance ministers, the pro-investment acronym 'BRIC' started to gain political traction. In the first three years, the interactions of BRIC were informal and took place only at ministerial level on the sideline of the UN General Assembly (UNGA). During this stage, 2008—the start of the financial crisis—was a key point for the seed of BRIC began to sprout. On 16 May 2008, the foreign ministers of BRIC held their meeting and published the very first Joint Communiqué (BRIC 2008a) in Yekaterinburg. Another important step was taken on 9 July 2008, the very first informal meeting of the heads of BRIC countries was held on the margins of the G8 Summit in Toyako (BRIC 2008b). Four months later, in São Paulo, the BRIC Finance Ministers released a Joint Communiqué (BRIC 2008c) to express their view on financial crisis, the reform of international financial institutions and global governance.

Emerging stage (2009-2013): this is an important stage of the BRIC(S) institutionalization, during which the contours of the BRICS framework on both dimensions were built and expanded. As recognized widely, the year of **2009** was a milestone for the BRIC to formalize the group. The 1st BRIC Summit held in Yekaterinburg on the Russian initiative, and the leaders of BRIC countries issued the first Joint Statement on the highest level. They discussed the current global financial crisis, global development, and prospects for further strengthening collaboration within the BRIC (2009). Moreover, supplementary to the ministerial and leader's level, the level of interactions expanded to Track II, which regards all kinds of platforms (i.e. forum, conference, workshop) as a useful channel for sharing knowledge and supporting further cooperation. For instance, the 1st BRIC Academic Forum and 1st BRIC International Competition Conference was held at the time. The year of **2011** was also a breakthrough for the BRICS evolutionary institution. South Africa formally joined the BRIC grouping this year, thus adding a meaningful "S" to the acronym of BRIC. Although the economic power of South Africa is incomparable with the other four countries, its inclusion allowed the BRICS to be more representative because of Johannesburg's leading role in Africa and membership in G20.

Meanwhile, from 2011 onwards, the leaders of BRICS countries have been issuing both Declaration and Action Plan in each Summit. From a political point of view, the level of

formality of Joint Action Plan is higher than a statement or declaration. Besides, in terms of the level of participants, for the first time, level of local governments joined the framework: meeting of Mayors of BRICS Cities and Friendship Cities was held in Qingdao, China.

The breadth of institutional framework was also expanding during this period. There were more and more interactions on new issue-areas: agriculture, trade, health, education, statistics, tax, science, technology and innovation (STI), etc. In particular, in the domain of finance, 2012 and 2013 were significant. In March 2012, BRICS finance ministers started to examine the feasibility of setting up a New Development Bank (NDB) “for mobilizing resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries” (BRICS 2012, 3; 2013, 3). Three months later, BRICS finance ministers and central bank governors began to “explore the construction of a financial safety net through the creation of a Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) amongst BRICS countries” (BRICS 2013, 4). In 2013, institutional links and cooperation was further strengthened and leaders agreed to establish the NDB and CRA at the 5th Summit.

Semi-institutionalization stage (2014-now): considering the materialization of the first visible BRICS institution, this stage is marked as a significant progress for the institutionalization of BRICS as a group. In terms of deepening depth of cooperation, the 6th BRICS Summit in 2014 produced a highly important result—the Agreement on the NDB and the Treaty for the Establishment of CRA —were signed by BRICS leaders. The two institutions will possess a total of \$200 billion (BRICS 2014a). Furthermore, the year of 2015 and 2016, the BRICS are consolidating and speeding up their cooperation on financial dimension via the newborn institution. On 11 May 2015, K. V. Kamath was elected as the first President of the bank. Two months later, the first Board of Governors meeting of the Bank was held on 7 July 2015 in Moscow, marked the entry into force of the Agreement on the NDB. On 27 February 2016, the bank signed Headquarters Agreement with the Government of China and the Memorandum of Understanding with Shanghai Municipal People’s Government concerning the arrangements in relation to Headquarters of the bank in Shanghai (BRICS NDB 2016a). Infrastructure and sustainable development are the key focus areas of the bank, meanwhile, to operate its mission, it is recruiting staff globally now (BRICS NDB 2016b). On other issue-areas, the depth of institutionalization has been strengthened also, for instance, the leaders released the BRICS Strategy for Economic Partnership and a draft BRICS Roadmap for BRICS Trade, Economic and Investment Cooperation (BRICS 2015a, b).

In addition, in line with the depth deepening on level of participants and outcomes, the breadth of institutional framework is keeping expanding during this stage. More and more ministers, senior officials, working groups, and Track II interlocutors are involved in the framework of new issue-areas for the first time. 1) Ministerial level: 1st meeting of BRICS Ministers of youth affairs, BRICS Sherpas and Sous-Sherpas, BRICS Ministers of Culture, BRICS Ministers of Environment, BRICS Energy Ministers, etc. 2) Sectoral level: meeting of BRICS Heads of Tax Administrations, BRICS Heads of Customs Agencies; BRICS Heads of Prosecution Services, BRICS Heads of National Standardization Bodies, BRICS Heads of the Migration Authorities, etc. 3) Working group: 1st Meeting of BRICS Solid State Lighting Working Group, 1st Meeting of the BRICS Anti-Drug Working Group, BRICS Experts on Anti-corruption

cooperation, BRICS Expert Working Group on Cyber-Security, BRICS Working Group on Labour, etc. 4) Track II: 1st BRICS Parliamentary Forum, 1st BRICS Youth Summit, 1st BRICS Economic Think Tank Forum, 1st BRICS Workshop on Prevention and Mitigation of Natural Disasters, 1st BRICS Civil Forum, etc.

Hence, recall what the BRICS leaders has claimed “we aim at progressively developing BRICS into a full-fledged mechanism of current and long-term coordination on a wide range of key issues of the world economy and politics” in the 5th Summit (BRICS 2013), it seems that the BRICS is on the right track at this stage. Moreover, according to the current India's BRICS Chairmanship, “the institution building to further deepen, sustain and institutionalize BRICS cooperation” is ranked the first among the five-pronged approach (BRICS 2016). It is worth to observe the following institutional building process and pay more attention on scrutinize the operationalizing mechanisms.

3.4 Characteristics of the BRICS institutionalization

Despite the fact that every BRICS country has different economic systems and social-political settings, as well as heterogeneous domestic interests and values. The BRICS, as such a nascent informal multilateral grouping evolving through less than a decade, comparing its current institutional format with the embryonic one, its institutional building capacity should not be overlooked or overestimated. This section discusses some features of BRICS format that emerged from the empirical evidences.

3.4.1 Degree of BRICS institutionalization: varies considerably on different issue-areas

Over time, given limited resources, preferred interests, and different stages of BRICS institutional developments, the degree of institutionalization in different issue-areas varies considerably. This feature makes a good deal of sense to the debate on how the BRICS should be perceived as a group. Based on the dataset, for illustrative rather than comprehensive, table 4 shows the degrees of BRICS institutionalization vary considerably in different issue-areas with respect to both the breadth and depth.

Table 4. Example of varying degree of institutionalization in some issue-areas

		<i>Breadth: scope of issue areas, number of interactions</i>		
		<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Depth: levels and outcomes</i>	<i>Low</i>	Wellness; Civil issue	Security	
	<i>Medium</i>	Health; Migration; Environment	STI; Trade	Agriculture; Foreign Policy
	<i>High</i>			Financial: NDB, CRA

Up to now, the strongest “mortar” is generated in the financial domain: intensive interactions,

at all levels, throughout time and visible outcomes. This is coherent with the fact that BRICS nations are unsatisfied with their generally under-represented status in the international financial institutions (IFIs), *inter alia*, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). Therefore, BRICS countries work closely in this field through BRICS format with the aim to reform the “unjust” western-dominated international institutions. Meanwhile, they continuously express joint support for upgrading the role of the G20 (Keuleleire and Hooijmaaijers 2014).

Apart from the financial area, institutionalization in the fields such as health, migration, environment, STI, trade, agriculture and foreign policy is to some extent. Regular consultations, knowledge sharing and somewhat policy coordination can be found in these fields. In terms of institutional building of these issue-areas, it remains juvenile to yield a common system of interests or values to form a cohesive force. Moreover, policy domains such as wellness and civil issues are just arriving in the BRICS table, showing very low degree of institutionalization. The uneven picture of BRICS institutionalization and dynamics vary from one issue to another indicates: 1) BRICS countries share a pragmatic approach to cooperate; 2) despite the BRICS format covers almost full range of issues, it has clear priority agendas; 3) BRICS format has both untapped potentials and structural limitations.

3.4.2 Summit diplomacy: BRICS strengthens its institutional links with developing world and promotes south-south cooperation

As few scholars have noticed that, the BRICS starts to develop its external links with developing countries through regional economies and organizations (Keuleleire and Hooijmaaijers 2014, Duggan 2015, Burnay et al. 2015). It deserves more attention that, taking the geopolitical advantage of BRICS countries locate in four continents, the group seizes the opportunity of each summit to strengthen its institutional links with regional organizations and developing world from 2013 onwards. This external practice puts the BRICS and regional powers coming together and searching common ground to work in synergy.

In March 2013, South Africa hosted the 5th BRICS summit in Durban under the theme entitled “BRICS and Africa: partnerships for development, integration and Industrialization”. As stated in the eThekweni Declaration “we are open to increasing our engagement and cooperation with non-BRICS countries, in particular Emerging Market and Developing Countries (EMDCs), and relevant international and regional organizations” (BRICS 2013a). For the first time that Africa Union (AU) has been invited to join in BRICS summit. After the Summit, a retreat held together by BRICS leaders and 15 African leaders under the theme: “Unlocking Africa’s potential: BRICS and Africa Cooperation on Infrastructure” (BRICS 2013ab). BRICS regarded this as “an opportunity for BRICS and African leaders to discuss how to strengthen cooperation between the BRICS countries and the African Continent” (BRICS 2013a). Coupled with the further strengthening of the New Development Bank at and after the summit, it matches well with the focus on lending for infrastructural projects in the developing world.

Follow the same format, in July 2014, Brazil hosted the 6th BRICS Summit in Fortaleza under the theme of “Inclusive Growth: Sustainable Solutions”. As BRICS leaders declared “we renew our openness to increasing engagement with other countries, particularly developing countries

and emerging market economies, as well as with international and regional organizations, with a view to fostering cooperation and solidarity in our relations with all nations and peoples” (BRICS 2014a). To this end, leaders of Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) were invited to attend the Summit and discussed “shared interests” with BRICS leaders (BRICS 2014ab).

In July 2015, under the theme of “BRICS Partnership – a Powerful Factor of Global Development”, the 7th BRICS Summit and 15th Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) were jointly held by Russia in Ufa (BRICS 2015). The three groupings were not put together randomly. First, against the backdrop of Ukraine Crisis, Russia has been under the EU and US sanctions, hence the joint summit offered a multi-channel for Russia to gain support from its partners. Second, the multi-channel opening up new prospects for deepening practical cooperation among BRICS (especially Russia and China in this case), SCO, and EEU. For instance, two months prior to the summit, Russia and China had signed an agreement on the cooperation in docking the initiative of Belt and Road and construction of the EEU, opening up new prospect for deepening practical cooperation among the member states of the SCO⁴. As beyond security and political issues, the SCO continually increases its economic cooperation, its function of linking the EEU with Belt and Road Initiative was further discussed during the summit⁵.

Taking the influential role of BRICS countries in various international (UN, G20, WTO, IMF, WB, G77, etc.) and regional organizations (EEU, SCO, AU, MERCOSUR, Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, Southern African Development Community, etc.) into account, this strategic summit diplomacy is not inconsequential. Beyond using the existing frameworks, this practice creates one more privileged channel for the BRICS countries to position themselves collectively by fostering south-south consensus on substantial issues of mutual agreement.

3.4.3 Relational Multilateralism? Informal, relational-based, process-oriented but not necessarily ineffective

The BRICS format is an informal mechanism that seeking consensus among like-minded partners. In contrast to the EU’s notion of “effective multilateralism” — “a preference for legally binding commitments and powerful international regimes as the outcomes and instruments of multilateral cooperation” (Keukeleire and Hooijmaaijers, 2014), the BRICS was not established on the legally binding, rule-based ground.

Throughout the history of BRICS evolution, except one treaty (Treaty for the Establishment of a BRICS CRA) was signed, the majority documents are non-legally binding statements, declarations, MoU, and communique. Apart from intra-BRICS cooperation, its external cooperation with developing world also follows the same format: decision-making by consensus, absence of treaty obligations, voluntary commitments and respect for national sovereignty (Narine 2012, Keukeleire and Hooijmaaijers 2014). Furthermore, as stated above, despite of the limited institutionalization in some issue-areas, the BRICS countries keep on

⁴ see http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/t1271481.shtml

⁵ see <http://thebricspost.com/putin-xi-meet-on-sidelines-of-brics-summit/#.VyfbSZN94Y0>

invest time and effort to exchange of views within the framework in these fields. Theoretically, as Qin argues—process and relations are significant — “to maintain a process is to maintain and allow room to relationships flow, which activates the interaction for identity construction” (Qin, 2009: 10). Besides, he regards relations and relational webs/networking as important resources to produce power (Qin, 2009: 16-18). To interpret the BRICS format by apply Qin’s insights, for the heterogeneous BRICS, this sort of soft, informal, relational-based, and process-oriented format might be more effective to generate mortar and build trust than the other way. Meanwhile, this may also make BRICS resilient to the changing situations inside or outside.

IV. Implications for the EU-BRICS Strategic Partnerships

The rise of BRICS countries and the development of BRICS institutionalization put forward mixed opportunities and challenges for the EU.

4.1 Strategic partnership and “Global strategy”

4.2 Strategic partnership and “Effective multilateralism”

VI. Conclusion

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- BRIC 2008b Brazil, Russia, India and China Finance Ministers
- BRIC 2008c see <http://en.brics2015.ru/docs/index/faq.html>
- BRIC 2009 <http://brics2016.gov.in/delcarations/1st%20dec.pdf>
- BRICS 2013a <http://brics5.co.za/about-brics/summit-declaration/fifth-summit/>
- BRICS 2013b <http://brics5.co.za/about-brics/the-brics-leaders-africa-dialogue-forum-retreat/>
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- BRICS 2016 <http://brics2016.gov.in/8summit.php>
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Appendix

Overview of sources included in the dataset

	Name	About	Source	Notes
Primary data	Official website of presidency ⁶	8 th Summit, Goa, India, 2016	http://brics2016.gov.in/index.php	News release, documents, and calendar can be found in the website.
		7 th Summit, Ufa, Russia, 2015	http://en.brics2015.ru/	Rich information on media coverage, documents, speeches, programme, etc.
		6 th Summit, Fortaleza, Brazil, 2014	http://brics6.itamaraty.gov.br/	Information on press release, documents, programme etc.
		5 th Summit, Durban, South Africa, 2013	http://brics5.co.za/	Documents, speeches, press release, etc.
	Official website of NDB	The official website of BRICS New Development Bank.	http://www.ndb.int/index.php	Information on identity, leadership, genesis, documents, press releases, speeches, etc.
BRICS Information Sharing and Exchange Platform (hereinafter referred to as BRICS Portal)	It is the authoritative platform of BRICS-related information jointly developed by the Center for BRICS Studies of Fudan University and the BRICS Business Council.	http://www.brics-info.org/	Information on documents, press releases, speeches, best practices, opportunities etc.	
Secondary data	Center for BRICS Studies, Fudan University	Established in March 24, 2012. A principal source of BRICS study in China.	http://www.brics.fudan.edu.cn/	1) Overview of BRICS major events in Chinese (2005-2013) 2) Selective BRICS documents in English (2008-2013)
	BRICS Information Center, University of Toronto	A leading source of information and analysis on BRICS issues.	http://www.brics.utoronto.ca	1) Comprehensive documents of the BRICS (2008-2016) 2) Publication on BRICS issues
	International Organizations Research Institute, Russia National Research University	Launched at the BRICS Ufa summit, 2015. Contained comprehensive presentation the forum's activities.	http://www.hse.ru/en/org/hse/iori/bricsdoc	Joint BRICS Website 1) key documents of the BRICS (2008-2016) 2) selective news of BRICS member states
	<i>The BRICs and the future of global order</i>	A book offers a definitive reference history of the BRICS as a term and as an institution.	Stuenkel (2015). <i>The BRICs and the future of global order</i> . Lexington Books.	In Apendix II, Stuenkel listed BRICS meetings (Sep 2006-July 2014)

⁶ Prior to 2012, there was no official website of BRICS presidency. Besides, India's presidency had created an official website by the time of 2012, but the site cannot be reached anymore.

