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BRICS and the EUROPEAN UNION: RIVALRY OR COOPERATION?

The European Union and the BRICS group are formally similar interstate associations, but in many ways, they are antagonists. We can say that in a sense, the European Union is the past, and the BRICS is the future of international politics. Therefore, their further development is of interest for understanding how interstate formations will develop in the XXI century.

The EU integration model was formed by the countries of Western Europe after the Second World War and was based on common values, solidarity of its participants on the main issues of domestic and foreign policy, the resolution of conflicts between them through negotiations without the use of military force. The leaders of the European integration process were Germany and France, which relied on US military and economic assistance. However, in recent years, the EU integration model has begun to experience certain problems under the influence of external challenges and accumulated internal problems. Within the EU, the balance of power began to change and Germany increasingly sought to become its real leader, being the economically strongest. Serious splits on value issues began to arise in the EU, which became especially noticeable after the start of Russia's Special Military Operation in Ukraine. The BRICS group, which emerged at the beginning of the XXI century under the domination of the liberal world order, gradually began to turn into its alternative, which is characterized by the absence of one clear leader. Therefore, BRICS can be considered a kind of prototype of real multipolarity, in which the basis of the behavior of states is not block affiliation, but the ability to coordinate their interests with the interests of their partners.

All BRICS member countries are connected with the EU by many economic and political interests, which is both a competitor and an investor for them, as well as an important factor in their relations with each other and with the United States. Each of these countries has its own experience of interaction with the European Union and its member states, the presence of which will allow us to develop a framework for a collective BRICS strategy for the EU.

Brazil sought to cooperate with Europe on an equal footing and demanded recognition of its economic interests in the framework of negotiations between MERCOSUR and the EU, which began in 1995. Not wanting to be a junior partner, Brazil began to use the "Big Twenty" to defend its global ambitions, intending to become an informal leader of the Global South. In addition, BRICS has gradually become an important tool for the realization of Brazilian national interests, and China has become a trade and investment partner of Brazil comparable with Europe. Bolsonaro, who came to power in 2019, declared the United States as his main partner, and the European Union as a partner faded into the background. He was interested in Europe only as a source of investment and technology and a promising market in the event of the signing of an agreement between MERCOSUR and the EU. But soon there were serious

confrontations between E. Macron and J. Bolsonaro, after Macron promised not to ratify the trade deal if Brazil withdraws from the climate agreement. In the future, the contradictions between the Brazilian leadership and the Europeans (only grew. The election of Brazilian President Lula gives hope for normalization of relations with the EU.

Relations between the *European Union and China* have undergone a serious transformation after 2020, due to the alignment of the economic and technological potentials of the EU and China, Brussels' dissatisfaction with China's policy towards individual members of the Union, Europe's dependence on the United States. Relations with the EU have been one of the key factors of China's economic growth and technological modernization for many years. The struggle to maintain a presence in European markets and access to European technologies is at the heart of China's policy towards Europe. This direction is of crucial importance for Beijing in the context of the conflict with the US. Theoretically, the EU could derive considerable benefits from its current unique position, but it cannot do this because of the weakness of its foreign policy, which depends on the position of the United States.

Relations between *India and Europe* have developed in two different directions. One was related to its interaction with the EU, and the other was related to its bilateral interaction with its member countries, among which the leading partners were the United Kingdom (before Brexit), Germany and France. Relations between India and Europe were based on the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in 2004, based on common democratic principles, the rule of law, respect for human rights and the desire for peace and stability. The EU as a whole is India's largest trading partner: in 2018-2019. the volume of bilateral trade amounted to \$115.6 bln. In 2019 It was the tenth largest trading partner of the EU with a share of 1.9% of its trade and is the fourth largest exporter of services to the EU and the sixth largest recipient of services exported from EU countries.

India and the EU are officially considered strategic partners. In general, the achievements in relations between them in recent years leave much to be desired. Both sides need to build up ties not only in the economic sphere, but also in the field of politics and security. They are interested in stability in Central and Western Asia, Africa and the Indian Ocean. It is important for both sides to realize their goals and objectives set out in the roadmap until 2025 in order to strengthen their strategic partnership in a changing world order.

Russia has been striving for many years to become one of the elements of the European balance of power. Today we see the completion of this process. Russia has decided to forget the idea of a "Greater Europe" for the coming years and has moved on to the implementation of the "Greater Eurasia" project based on close economic cooperation between Russia – the EAEU – China – SCO - "Belt and Road". Comparing the current relations between Russia, the EAEU and China with the relations between Strengthening economic and political-diplomatic relations in this space is incomparable with the frozen political dialogue with the EU and its key member states. China has become the main trade and economic partner of the Russian Federation, and the volume of Russian-Chinese trade turnover is 2 times higher than

the trade turnover of the RF with Germany. Russia considers itself not just an ally of China, but also a separate independent pole of the multipolar world, building relations of equal partnership with Beijing. "Greater Eurasia" is the result of the mutual decision of two independent centers of power to abandon the "zero-sum game" in the region of common neighborhood and cooperate for the benefit of each other's economic development and security. BRICS embodies the position of the Russian Federation as an independent pole of a multipolar world, developing partnerships not only with China, but also with other non-Western centers of power.

As Russia and the EU became more and more distant from each other in political, military-political, value and integration relations, the BRICS began to play an increasingly significant role in Russian foreign policy. Strengthening itself as an independent global power center, participant and one of the leaders of the "Greater Eurasia", Russia considers BRICS as the most natural platform for global governance. In the coming years, you can forget about the special relations between the Russian Federation and the EU, characteristic of the period after the end of the cold war. The events in Belarus, Moldova, Transcaucasia and Ukraine indicate that Russia will combine rivalry with the EU in the post-Soviet space and in the energy sector with elements of cooperation with individual EU member states, and with selective cooperation in the international arena (for example, on Iran's nuclear program).

Currently, *South Africa's* largest trading partner among nation states is China. But if we talk about the regions, the EU still remains in the first place. Although the development of political relations lags behind economic ones, Europe remains the most important partner of South Africa, with which the republic successfully develops bilateral ties. In addition, Europe helps South Africa in the implementation of foreign policy in the African region. This also applies to the situation in the world, where the policy of multilateralism is being increasingly threatened.

Europe, like the West as a whole, has dominated international affairs for more than five hundred years. First of all, due to its military power, followed by leadership in the economy and the world of ideas. Now the balance of power in world affairs is changing. The serious growth of the real importance of Asian countries in the global economy and politics has already led to the fact that its center has shifted to Asia. This inevitably reduces the importance of the European order for global stability. Europe has ceased to be the epicenter of international politics, although it has remained an active participant in it.

Due to the influence of Europe and the importance of the place it occupies in international affairs (it does not matter – as a subject or object of policy), it cannot now be said that it does not have great significance for the BRICS member countries. And therefore, it is important to understand how the leading non-European countries see Europe and their interests in relation to it. But it is also obvious that these relations are not of central importance for non-European countries in terms of their survival in international politics and the world economy. They remain important, but not central. Relations with Europe for the BRICS countries may be one of the priorities of national foreign policy, but this is no longer the main thing.

Relations between the BRICS and the EU will continue to develop in three directions: economy; politics and civil dialogue. Economic relations will remain a priority even if, after the end of the special military operation of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, sanctions against it are weakened, the possibility of concluding a comprehensive trade, economic and investment agreement between the EU and BRICS providing for their expansion and deepening is not excluded. On the political track, it is unlikely to expect any breakthroughs, but it is possible to establish regular BRICS-EU summits, in which the parties could constructively discuss and solve major international and bilateral political problems. And finally, the civil dialogue, which is currently in its infancy, requires more development by investing mutual exchanges with representatives of non-governmental organizations, easing the visa regime, involving media representatives in the coverage of contacts between BRICS and the EU, etc.