EUROPEAN

POLICYBRIEF

THE EU AND THE ROLE OF REGIONAL LEADERS

This policy brief is based on findings of the third Work Package of the GR:EEN research project. This Work Package, led by UNU-CRIS, deals with "The Role of Regional Leadership in Multi-polarity: The EU, the Americas, Asia, Africa & the Pacific". In this brief, we suggest six policy recommendations in order for the EU to increase its relevance in an increasing multi-polar world:

1. The EU needs to call out the BRICS and other emerging anchor states to take greater responsibility in dealing with common global challenges;
2. Ties with the US should continue to be the top priority with the EU ensuring that any plans on an Asian Pivot by the US do not adversely affect the EU;
3. The EU and its member states should explore ways of actively participating in the new institutions being set up by the BRICS;
4. A common front is needed by both the EU and the larger member states in dealing with the BRICS and other emerging countries;
5. A category of challenges should be developed which is then aligned to specific relevant anchor states with which the EU can work on specific issue areas;
6. Greater engagement is needed between the Union and specific regional organizations in which the BRICS are active.

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INTRODUCTION

In his recent *magnum opus,* World Order, the dean of United States' (US) foreign policy Henry Kissinger (2014) presents a canvass of the complexity of competing perspectives on world order. He considers how these competing understandings of world order can render the conduct of international cooperation even more convoluted as an enterprise. As a unique experiment in post war interaction and cooperation, the European Union has played a significant role in the varied perceptions of world order. But as the understanding of world order shifts and international attention migrates toward different poles of opportunities and challenges (Hampson and Heinbecker, 2011: 299) with geography becoming ever more salient (Rosecrance, 2014: 201) the EU is keen to explore ways in which it can better understand leadership dynamics in other parts of the world. The objective of Work Package 3 of the project on Global Re-Ordering has been geared at providing the Union with insights on the specific approaches and substance to be explored in its ties with regional leaders. Drafting this brief now, could not be timelier. In 2014 a new European Parliament was elected and the Juncker Commission was put in place. 2015 will not only mark the threshold for the discussions on actions on the post-2015 sustainable development goals but will also be a year when the EU will review its Europe 2020 Strategy. So discussions on the EU's engagement with specific regional leaders could not have occurred at a more apposite time.

One of the main assumptions behind our understanding of the task has been a realization that unlike the postulates of Fukuyama on the end of history (Fukuyama, 1989) or the polemics of Krauthammer of a unipolar world still dominated by the US (Krauthammer, 1991; 2003), power is increasingly more dispersed around the world. So in dealing with crucial contemporary challenges, directing and appropriating resources to exert influence has to mirror the fact that power is not only a monopoly of Washington DC. This is so independently of the fact that the US' leadership role "on the ground" is not in doubt.

Regional leadership as presented in this policy brief focuses on the BRICS. But the policy implications deduced have ramifications relevant beyond the BRICS. Each of the BRICS has many status challengers. However our analysis focuses on these five countries because they have collectively decided to forge alternatives to the current international economic institutional architecture (Bohler-Muller and Kornegay, 2013: xxvi). Individually they are also adopting policy positions that run at cross purposes with the traditional European-generated and Westphalia-based understanding of world order. Recent activities of Russia in Ukraine or the stances of Beijing over the democratic agitations in Hong Kong indicate that these powers are keen to assert their positions as independently influential agents even if that means being described as revisionist. In focusing on the BRICS we fully understand that as an analytical category it remains untested and analysis on their collective actions is still embryonic at best (Leo, 2013: 36).

Leadership is a fraught and contested concept. Beyond holistic approaches to the concept we are aware that a thematic and more substantive rendition of the notion tends to be more attuned to reality. But taking all these nuances into account we consider regional leadership to be "a concept used to describe the capacity of an actor to influence certain aspects of international relations and in some occasions the internal functioning of an actor in its regional neighbourhood" (Van Langenhove et al., 2015). As such it is postulated that "a state is more likely to be positioned effectively as a regional leader: (i) the stronger its willingness to lead; (ii) the sharper its capacity to

lead and finally; (iii) the greater the acceptance of its leadership" (Van Langenhove et al., 2015). Many studies have already been conducted in international relations and EU studies that endeavour to conceptualise roles, performance and leadership (Bradford, 2012; Hill, 1993: 314; Kirchner and Dominguez, 2011). The willingness, acceptance and capacity variables comprehensively capture the myriad of conceptual avenues that can be contemplated in better understanding regional leadership in an era of competing and emerging poles of influence.

What stands out clearly in a thorough evaluation of all the BRICS is that they are all invariably keen to assert leadership within their regions. On willingness Brazil is now explicit in its desire to be influential in South America especially in its more active engagement within the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). Russia makes no bones of using the Eurasian Economic Community (EURASEC) as a platform to build a core counter force to the EU through economic and geo-strategic manoeuvres. India is less willing to fully nurture the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in spite of the lip service paid to regional cooperation. China's relations with its neighbours such as The Philippines and Vietnam have been unsettling in the past years due to maritime differences. Beijing has not exhibited a clear penchant for comprehensively addressing such problems through regional fora such as Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) +3 or the Asian Security Forum. South Africa has clearly made some useful noises on the need for it to discharge the responsibility of being a regional leader. But unlike its BRICS counterparts Pretoria's capacity for such regional leadership is rusty at best. In terms of acceptance all of the countries have very doubtful followers who often tend to be very sceptical or even antagonistic to the plans of the BRICS in their respective regions. In certain instances it is clear that some of the countries like Brazil and South Africa tend to lean on their regional credentials (resisted by some) to make claims for greater visibility and leverage at the global level where their efforts to assert claims to leadership especially in terms of global economic architecture remains unremarkable.

The EU has a strategy for ten major powers including all the BRICS. This is a good start. What could also be important is that the Union is not taken off guard when its individual strategies for these countries are upended by a more assertive pose and inclination of the countries to align themselves and act together on crucial issues. For instance each of the BRICS takes the group seriously. As such in the crisis over the Ukraine the Union would have benefitted more had there been a clearer approach of engaging the BRICS collectively. Lacking a strategy for such an unpredictable alliance is ill-advised at the moment. The stances of China and India on Ukraine amply indicate that impromptu responses to deviance in the absence of a comprehensive strategy will be irresponsible.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

The very first consideration worth noting is the increased demand from regional leading states such as the BRICS for greater representation in international organizations especially within international economic institutions. While some steps have been taken to meet these demands in terms of increased voting powers and consolidation of constituencies in some international financial institutions, the BRICS and some status challengers still clearly want more. What stands out as a paradox is that many of these states disagree on the criteria to be used to secure greater representation for specific members in international organizations. The case of the UN Security Council is the most cogent. The BRICS have constantly rehearsed the need for better global governance (code-name for greater influence in these institutions in terms of representation). Where they have fallen short, is in providing an

objective formula on which such reform can be based. It is hard to see how they can seek consensus on such questions from their peers let alone from their status challengers such as Pakistan for India or Nigeria for South Africa. What is more important is that these regional leaders such as the BRICS need to first demonstrate that they can amply contribute significant resources in dealing with common challenges and not constantly free ride on the actions and efforts of others. Common problems such as ISIS and Ebola provide an opportunity for them to step up and lead but this has hitherto not been the case. Far from Huntington's caution of the US drifting toward becoming a "hollow hegemon" (Huntington, 1999: 40) on all these recent challenges Washington instead asserted its authority. Second, evidence from the studies conducted throughout the GR:EEN project as well as data sourced from various institutions indicates that the upbeat rhetoric that has accompanied discussions on regional leaders such as BRICS has to be treated with great caution. As indicated on the table below on many key indicators in terms of human development the BRICS still trail the US.[1]

On economic growth, World Bank figures indicate that all the BRICS have chronicled a consistent diminution in their previous stellar growth performances. Brazil slipped from 7.5% growth in 2010 to a paltry 2.5% in 2013. The economy still continues to experience a recession. Russia lumbered on from a growth rate of 4.5% in 2010 to a dismal 1.3% in 2013. The double digit growth economies of India and China have also taken a hit. India has slid from 10.3% to 5% in the same period while China's economy cooled from an eye-whopping 10.4% in 2010 to 7.7% in 2013. South Africa's relatively smaller economy weakened from 3.1% to 1.9% during the period accounted for. So while there is no question that these economies matter as O'Neill argues (O'Neill, 2013), reality is more in line with the caution sounded by Sharma in his characteristically astute fashion (Sharma, 2012; 2014). Reasons for the dampening of growth can be attributed to the global financial crisis and weakened demand; the Eurozone crisis and the lack of ample reforms in some of the emerging countries.

Regarding the real implications and meaning behind the growth numbers the story is even starker. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) of 2014, none of the BRICS come within the first 50 states in terms of human development. The US comes 5th in a tally of 187 countries while the best BRICS is Russia (57) and the worst is India (135). To put the numbers into context, Iraq ranks 120.th It is hoped that the arrival of Narendra Modi and his reform agenda could help reverse some of the adverse problems India is facing. While some of the BRICS have registered high growth rates inequality remains a crucial problem that may actually hamper the sustainability of their efforts (Beausang, 2012: 97). For instance in China 0.4% of the population owns 70% of the nation's wealth; in India the caste system has aggravated inequality; in Russia the poor are at the mercy of oligarchs; in Brazil one of the worst degrees of inequality is on display (Ibid: 113-128). In South Africa we have a country with one of the worst Gini coefficients. All these countries seem to have, in Hurrell's words a shared sense of vulnerability (Hurrell, 2006: 18).

Respecting the World Bank's Doing Business rankings only Russia and Brazil improved their performance between 2010 and 2014. While the US is ranked 4th in 2014 the BRICS are respectively tailgating at 116, 92, 134, 96, and 41. The story of a poor business environment in the countries correlates with their poor performance regarding innovation as assessed by INSEAD de Paris, Cornell University and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). According to the 2014 Global Innovation Index, none of the BRICS features amongst the top 20 leading

[1] We use 2010 as the base line year for most of the indicators mindful that the project started then. Cut offs are either 2013 or 2014 as a function of available data and also because the project comes to a close around the end of 2014.

innovating countries meanwhile the US is ranked 6th improving on its 11th spot in 2010. It will be challenging for the BRICS to converge economically with Western nations if their levels of innovation remain relatively weak (Beausang, 2012: 8-9).

In terms of military expenditure which indicates the kind of attention placed on security matters by leaders in these countries it is clear that this has either fallen or stagnated. The major exception is Russia whose military spending increased between 2010 and 2013 from 3.9% to 4.2%. In a way one can better contextualize its forays and adventures in its neighbourhood in the back drop of a hike in its military spending. At the same time in Washington, there has instead been a marked erosion of military spending due to sequestration. China is another player to watch closely. While its military spending plateaued at 2.1% of GDP between 2010 and 2013 there is no question that Beijing has been rearming significantly leaving its neighbours jaded and worried. It does not conceal its global military ambitions (Jisi, 2011: 76). All these pointers indicate that on key indicators the US remains a vital partner.[2]

	Military Expenditure as % GDP		Innovation Index		Doing Business		Human Development Index	Economic Growth	
	2010	**2013**	**2010**	**2014**	**2010**	**2014**	**2014**	**2010**	**2013**
Brazil	1.6	1.4	68	61	129	116	79	7.5	2.5
Russia	3.9	4.2	64	49	120	92	57	4.5	1.3
India	2.7	2.4	56	76	133	134	135	10.3	5
China	2.1	2.1	43	29	89	96	91	10.4	7.7
South Africa	1.1	1.2	51	53	34	41	118	3.1	1.9
United States	4.7	3.8	11	6	4	4	5	2.5	1.9

Table: Key Differential Indicators for the BRICS and the US
Source: Adaptation by the authors based on the web citations mentioned in the references section

Third, the advent of loose alliances such as BRICS may elicit a number of reactions: support, collaboration or cynicism. The BRICS are now gaining momentum and have started creating institutions which will be very important. A supportive relationship whereby Western countries are approached to support the BRICS bank for instance is unlikely to happen mindful that the institution is engineered and sold as a clear alternative to what the world has so far experienced in terms of multilateral development banks (MDBs). Collaboration whereby non-BRICS states are called upon to paid up shares will be crucial. But such collaboration will be a function of the policy space and margin of transaction that can be allowed non-BRICS states. In any event, it will be vital that non-BRICS states also participate in the capital stock of the bank so as to dilute the very real and unhelpful prospects of the five BRICS members forging a secluded alliance based on a financial outfit with unclear motives and ambitions that could run at cross purposes with that of some extant MDBs. Collaboration will be important as the BRICS New Development Bank has important potential especially in terms of infrastructure finance and funding of effective environmental policies (Romani, Stern and Stiglitz, 2012). Cynicism has also been one of the responses to the

[2] It is almost an indispensable actor (Ferguson, 2004).

efforts of the new regional leaders including the BRICS. This attitude is fed by a sense that the BRICS are not amply discharging and paying up for the privilege of leadership status which they so cherish.

Fourth, the constant challenge of speaking with a single voice remains patent. In spite of the Treaty of Lisbon's provisions that birth the double hatted role of the High Representative it is not always clear that the person occupying that position can fully speak on behalf of the Union. It will be perennially challenging for the Union to speak with a single voice when the EU's UN Security Council members understandably remain so attached to their privileges in the UN Security Council. Also countries have different interests and needs in spite of the rhetoric on unity. The reservations expressed by given EU member states over Russian sanctions amply indicate this.

Fifth, the EU has ten strategic partnerships, Brazil and Mexico in Latin America, Canada and the United States in North America, South Africa on the African continent, and China, India, Japan, South Korea in Asia, and Russia in Europe. However, the term "strategic partnership" does not reflect a coherent group of arrangements. Countries which are leading in one area might not be doing this in other areas. Van Langenhove et al. (2015) contend that "an actor's leadership can vary over different issue areas; for instance, Japan can reflect higher levels of RL with regard to economic issues than with respect to military issues. Similarly, Brazil exercises economic leadership inside Mercosur, while the same can be said about South Africa in relation to its immediate neighbours. Furthermore, the moral leadership of the post-Apartheid South Africa in terms of anti-racism and civic equality is largely accepted. This variability makes it possible that multiple regional leadership roles are taken up by different states in the region. They can exist next to each other depending on the issue at stake such as security, human rights, energy, environment, finance and trade" (Van Langenhove et al., 2015). Having a strategy for ten countries is a good starting point on the part of the EU. But it is only a starting point. What is needed is a broader and collective approach to groups necessitating collective strategic thinking. In any event it is important that any choice made in terms of strategy be backed up with sterling principled foundations and robust evidence based reasons.

Finally, in the past, there were strong hierarchical orders such as the regional orders organised around the United States and the Soviet Union (Garzón, 2013). In contemporary international systems, this is not the case anymore. Even though it is not empirically proven that the world is evolving into a world of regions, regional constellations do matter. If this is not so how can challenges such as those posed by ISIS and Ebola be amply addressed without the regional pillar added into the architecture of local, national and global governance responses? It is arguable that some of these problems have actually been allowed to metastasise mainly because the regional dimensions of the issues (sinews of the problems and potential solutions) have been neglected.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our own research and also on papers which were presented during GR:EEN workshops in Buenos Aires and Cape Town that covered a rich tapestry of topics and regions some useful insights were deduced.

1. On key global issues such as environmentally related challenges, threats posed by Islamic radicals and now the troubling spread of health problems such as Ebola, the BRICS have consistently missed opportunities to show the kind of leadership needed ceding grounds and opportunities in health diplomacy to the likes of the US, the United Kingdom and even Cuba. The BRICS' lackadaisical contributions in dealing with some of these regional and global threats leave much to be desired. In some

cases they are completely missing in action. **Leaders in Brussels have an opportunity now to call on the BRICS openly to back their rhetoric of leadership with actions geared at confronting challenges such as climate change; religious fundamentalism and diseases.** As momentum toward post-2015 sustainable development goals reaches a crescendo, it is time to name and shame under-performers especially those who aspire toward greater global roles and privileges.

2. Linked to this is the importance of the continued ties between the EU and the US. In developing a strategy of dealing with the BRICS it is useful to have an understanding of the thinking in Washington DC on such as strategy. As the US remains a pre-eminent partner the EU should **continue to prioritise the relationship with the US ensuring that the US' Pivot to Asia is not at the detriment of EU's economic and security interests.**
3. We see no need for there to be panic about the rise of the BRICS. Economically their economies have been experiencing a cooling or at worst a recession as in the case of Brazil and increasingly Russia. With the exception of South Africa they remain formidable economic powers just by their sheer sizes. However this provides opportunities for the EU. In realizing the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy especially as it will be reviewed in 2015 further effort is needed in optimising European innovation in science and technology in cutting edge fields so that Europe stays competitive. Economic cooperation with the BRICS and other significant economies such as Mexico, South Korea and Turkey should be the watch word. This has been the very spirit of GR:EEN which we salute. This spirit was epitomized by accentuated levels of cooperation between researchers from both the EU and the emerging world including those from BRICS. **There is no reason why the proposed BRICS New Development Bank should pose a problem as the EU or its members can explore ways of participating in the paid up capital process for the bank when this is opened up**. But what will also be salient to watch closely is the policy space that will be allowed the International Monetary Fund in the functioning of the BRICS Contingency Reserve Arrangement.
4. In engaging the BRICS as regional leaders greater cohesion is needed within the Union. The current challenges over the Ukraine and especially in the cooperation with Russia brought many fissures in EU positions into sharper relief. Such differences however minute are easily exploited and rendered more insoluble by third states. Within the EU, there should be more clarity between partnerships of the EU and the actions of the (bigger) member states. So **the importance of developing a more robust common front in dealing with the BRICS, jointly and severally, should be prudently reflected upon**.
5. In its ties with the BRICS the EU should always be mindful of the critical role of BRICS' status challengers. In other words, for every BRICS country there seems to be a keen opponent. Argentina, Colombia, Turkey, Pakistan, Indonesia, South Korea and Nigeria are all countries that are also leaders in their own right in specific areas. Other anchor states such as Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia are equally crucial on existential security issues. As it is not always obvious which state is the regional leader (illustrated particularly in Latin America), the EU has to avoid being too selective in its choice of strategic regional partners. The Union should continue to emphasize bilateral relations with a broad range of emerging countries. An approach to be considered would be for the Union to **develop categories of critical challenges and anchor states with which the Union can work in dealing with the same**. Given that regional leadership is a complex concept, the relations between the EU and regional leading states should focus on **specific issue-areas**. A leader in one issue is not always a leader in other issue-areas.
6. In addition to this range of regional partners, the EU should meet more regularly with regional organisations which include emerging countries as members. There are a variety of platforms through

which the Union already engages with other regional organizations for instance on questions of democracy (facilitated by International IDEA) and also on issues of security (chaperoned by the UN Secretary General). Also it has developed decent institutional cooperation with regional organizations such as the African Union. We strongly advise that **the EU should extend formal cooperation and periodic exchanges with UNASUR, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and SAARC**. We believe that engagements through such inter-regional platforms have the potential to lock in binding commitments for regional leaders which bilateral cooperation with minnows can hardly ensure.

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FURTHER READING

All working papers, policy briefing papers and other publications are available on our website: www.greenfp7.eu/papers