



On August 22nd to 24th, 2023, South Africa will host the 15th BRICS Summit at Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg. BRICS consists of five countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. The "BRIC" concept was created in 2001 by the economist Jim O'Neill from Goldman Sachs, and the "S" was added after South Africa joined the group in 2010, writes Liviu Muresan.

In recent times, more countries have become interested in joining the group: Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Uruguay, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

Anil Soklal, South Africa's Ambassador to BRICS, announced that they had received several requests from countries in Asia, Latin America, Europe, as well as Africa. However, this growing interest for the BRICS project has probably various underlying motivations, which have to be accommodated within the broader framework, especially since this year's event takes place in a challenging international security environment.

The war in Ukraine has been unfolding for over 500 days, and there is no clear route yet to a negotiated peace. Relations between the United States and China have gradually sunk to one of the lowest levels in decades. The latest visits of high US officials to China represent a fragile attempt at rebuilding mutual trust.

The American analyst Fareed Zakaria considers that America's foreign policy has lost its flexibility and that it is coordinated by an elite that is "incapable of understanding that the world is changing, and quite rapidly." On the other hand, Fiona Hill, former member of Trump's National Security Council, draws attention to "America fatigue" and to growing disillusion about its role as the global hegemon.

The well established unipolar world that has been the predominant paradigm so far, with the USA as a global leader, could be approaching its end, opening the door for an evolving multipolar world. At an international level, new relations are taking shape and new organisations are coming into being or are already in operation. For instance, the Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI) has recently celebrated the tenth anniversary of its launch. It currently comprises 150 countries, with thousands of projects worth trillions USD. Thus, networks such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and BRI generate the possibility of enhanced cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union, ASEAN etc. They also have the potential of becoming a network of networks, with wider implications at a global scale.

Moreover, several of the countries that are current or future members of these networks have experienced both economic and demographic growth. In the present geopolitical context, these factors have brought to light the developing countries' dissatisfaction with their current under-representation in the main international organisations. At the same time, China and Russia have been subject to important international sanctions, initiated especially by the USA and the EU. Some of these sanctions have proved to be inefficient or even with effects contrary to those hoped for (in the case of Russia, for example, economic growth has continued, they have continued to benefit from international political support, as well as from new trade partnerships in the East).

In the current geopolitical landscape, the US and its allies should adjust to the new realities and give up its "superiority complex", realising that BRICS has the potential of becoming a credible global player, that no longer can be ignored.

One of the objectives at the Johannesburg Summit will be agreeing on a new payment instrument, meant to reduce the role of the USD in international exchanges, with the aim of eventually replacing it. The de-dollarisation process at an international level is under way already, as a result of pressure from most of the BRICS countries. However, the interests of the current members and those of possible future members have to be harmonized. India, currently at the presidency of SCO and G20, has revealed its own agenda, which seems to be no longer in line with that of other BRICS countries, especially China.

For instance, at the SCO Summit that took place in India early in July 2023, the host country refused to sign the final declaration of support for the BRI project, President Xi Jinping's flagship. Given the current tensions and clashes of interest among the global players, especially China and India, there is a lot at stake at the forthcoming BRICS Summit.

Events taking place in Johannesburg within the same timeframe with BRICS will include the BRICS Business Forum, BRICS Business Council, BRICS Outreach, BRICS Plus Dialogue with leaders from Africa and the Global South. A special place will be taken for the discussions around the New Development Bank and its growing role for supporting the strategic projects of BRICS members.

Topics on the Summit's Agenda include infrastructure, innovation, improvements to the urban environment, nuclear technologies for African development, building independent systems for assessing and promoting national science programmes and others.

BRICS, a real G5 of developing nations global actor, is consolidating its position as a competitor to G7 leading economies, while the US and the EU find it more and more difficult to control economic development on a global scale and to impose Western values. The latest developments reported from the war in Ukraine have brought to the surface the difficulties in maintaining various countries' willingness to continue their support for the war.

For China, this summit will represent a new opportunity for promoting its current projects, as well as its new initiatives, such as GDI (Global Development Initiative), GSI (Global Security Initiative), GCI (Global Civilisation Initiative). All of these are meant to consolidate and highlight its position, in the same vein as President Xi's statement addressed to President Putin, at the end of his visit to Moscow (March 2023), referring to unprecedented changes and to his determination: "Together, we should push forward these changes that have not happened for one hundred years."

This could be seen as China's and Russia's determination and potential to play a leading role. Hence, a motto proposal for the Summit in Johannesburg: To BRICS or not to BRICS.

Professor Liviu Muresan is Founder and Executive President of the EURISC Foundation (European Institute for Risk, Security and Communication Management) A former majority leader in the Romanian Parliament, he is the President of EURODEFENSE Romania