

With Belarus and Azerbaijan Becoming BRICS Members, Russia Gains Weight in Eurasia

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Russia today is taking another pivotal moment in its history, (with a series of many landmark issues) under its presidency of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), referred to as informal association, consistently forging collaborative relations with developing countries. With geopolitical situation heightening, spotifying challenges predominately remain on the association's track. But the evolving developments are positive and promising, particularly increasing number of countries expressing the desire to join BRICS. It shows an interesting and indelible sign which reflects the necessity for the world's re-configuration. This factor indicates the urgent yawning action for a multifaceted change, a new global architecture embracing geopolitics, the economy and security as well as socio-cultural and humanitarian spheres.

Noticeably, Latin American countries and also in Asian and African regions are carving to join BRICS. There are many reasons including the sovereign desire by like-minded countries to deepen their cooperation with BRICS with a proper sense of respect. In addition, BRICS follows an open-door vision, and strongly committed to the fact that the principles governing this format - mutual respect, balance of interests and a consensus-based approach - are very appealing. In the former Soviet space, Belarus and Azerbaijan have recently expressed their sanonymized interest to leverage unto BRICS platform.

“Azerbaijan has filed an official application for joining BRICS,” Azerbaijan’s news agency quoted Foreign Ministry’s spokesman, Aykhan Hajizada. Baku’s intention to join BRICS was reflected in a joint declaration on strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and China, which was signed on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Astana in early July.

Apart from that, Azerbaijani parliament speaker, Sakhiba Gafarova, said at a plenary session of the 10th BRICS Parliamentary Forum in St. Petersburg on July 11 that her country wanted to be a full-fledged BRICS member.

Image: Alexander Lukashenko, president of Belarus. (photo: Courtesy photo / www.kremlin.ru.)



Russia and Belarus have formed a Union State.

Late July, and even long before that, Belarusian **President Alexander Lukashenko** has publicly reiterated that Minsk had been invited to the BRICS summit, due in Kazan in October. Lukashenko, who has announced his resignation in 2025, irreversibly promised Belarus ascension into BRICS.

In this regard, Lukashenko instructed the Foreign Ministry to draw up a plan of Belarusian participation and bilateral meetings on that platform. That however, Belarus sees BRICS as a basis for economic development and is ready to join integration processes within the framework of the informal association. “We are interested in getting involved in integration processes in that space. BRICS is another footing to help us maintain balance and economic stability,” BelTA agency quoted Lukashenko as emphatically asserted.

Belarus and Azerbaijan are former Soviet republics, with common historical background despite the stark indications of disparity in approach to current politics and economic development, much still remains uniquely common in cultural practice and in the society. Undoubtedly, both the older and current generations have comprehensive understanding of Soviet history and culture. Therefore, Belarus and Azerbaijan governments and their state institutions such as the cabinet, legislative and judiciary, would endorse aligning to BRICS, and contribute towards shaping a new post-Soviet space within the framework of emerging new geopolitical reality.

As the majority of countries around the world face new, modern-day challenges, so it has become necessary to create conditions to combat Western and European threats to political and economic stability. The need to amplify their collective voices or positions in strengthening partnerships as illustrated by BRICS agenda which is very broad. The agenda is in line with the general motto adopted by Russia’s BRICS chairmanship, relating to the widest range of issues, including politics, security, economy, finance and on education, sports and humanitarian ties.

China and India Factors

While China and India have historically warm multiple ties with Russia, and even from Soviet times, both as BRICS members maintain closer economic partnerships with the Western world. China has comparatively more presence than India in Belarus and Azerbaijan, but future prospects exist for extensive collaborating through BRICS.

Within its calculated strategy, **China has a large footprint in the region, thanks to its Belt and Road Initiative.** But that aside, Belarus and Azerbaijan can still secure economic

partnerships and harness their modern technology and scientific innovations. Furthermore, public-private partnerships are crucial mechanism for mobilizing the necessary resources and expertise for development.

In terms of influence and economic presence, China is indiscriminately deepening its trading and investment relations across the entire former Soviet region, and the Eurasian Economic Union, using its own version of – not confrontation – but it deemed acceptable as ‘mutual cooperation’ and polycentricity. The 29th meeting between prime ministers of Russia and China (BRICS stalwart supporters of multi-polarity) reviewed economic cooperation, took cognizance of the huge untapped economic potentials generally in the Eurasian region, and specifically in the Russian Federation.

On August 21-22, Chinese **Premier Li Qiang** visited Minsk and held talks with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko which resulted sign agreements on investment and on a free trade area in the services sector. In addition Belarus would host an industrial zone for China’s new quality productive forces concept based on technologies, innovations and high-quality human potential. This reflects the absolute possibility for Chinese technologies to enter the Belarusian market in large numbers as the core mid-term task for the two countries’ governments, until 2030. The new agreement will enable Belarus to increase exports of its services to China by at least 12%-15% within the next five years, while investment in Belarus will grow by at least 30%, according to reports.

India has good relations in Belarus and Azerbaijan. India’s interest included science & technology cooperation. It continues, at present time, seeking investment and resources through Belarusian route for developing smart cities, improving the manufacturing sector and increasing skill development especially in the pharmaceutical industry. China and India are both active in Russia. Mutual trade between Russia and China is developing successfully, and the two governments are working well towards this, Russian President Vladimir Putin has noted in Kremlin reports. According to the government office, bilateral trade blossomed up to \$240.1 billion in June 2024.

Russia’s BRICS Diplomacy

For now, though, after years of declining Russia’s influence in many parts of the world, Moscow is steadily rising up. And at least, being a member of BRICS plays much supportive role. Russia’s presidency of the association has witnessed stern position against increasingly Western ‘domineering powers’ in recent years, and more recently pressurizing countries to back sanctions against Russia for its ‘special military operations’ in neighbouring Ukraine. Several BRICS documents and communiqués contained anti-Western positions, mostly against United States’ hegemony and neo-colonial character. As an association of states, BRICS is guided in its efforts by the principles of mutual respect and consensus, which rules out any attempts to dictate one’s will or impose any totalitarian administrative and oversight practices. Reiterating here that BRICS offers a good opportunity for discussing international matters, including the emergence of a new world order with better justice for all, and making efforts to strengthen cooperation between BRICS and the countries of the Global South and East, while enhancing their international role.

BRICS under Russia’s 2024 directorship has advanced steps to introduce its currency and a financial settlement and payment system platforms primarily targeting de-dollarization process. Coordinated by the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) which was established in 2015, these existing measures would, most probably, lead to drastic reduction in the use

and over-dependence of the dollar as world-wide currency. In the economic sphere, the BRICS countries have been discussing ways to promote sustainable development, to support the multilateral trading system, and to improve the global financial architecture.

In spite of the above, Vice Chairman of BRICS Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Sameep Shastri, and several state officials have indicated that BRICS member states are no longer attaching much importance to the dollar, one single currency, and are now successfully using national currencies. This, in the first step, underscored the assertions that Western countries are the strongest economies in the world. Therefore in the ultimate analysis, the economic power is steadily, or rather rapidly, shifting from the West to the Global South.

Challenges and Future Prospects

According to authentic estimates, more than 30 countries have applied to join BRICS, which now includes Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the UAE — and in a collective pursuit of an uncomfortable non-aligned policy. Experts have, however, pointed to strong relations beyond 'non-alignment' and beyond the confines of BRICS. As many countries express desire to join BRICS, to incorporate their unique non-aligned political and economic values, so also in parallel dimension are challenges and, worse the competitiveness by key Western players and multinational organizations such as International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World bank. BRICS is simply anti-Western association and has its own principles. The question over Belarus and Azerbaijan here also brings into focus Eurasian regional security. We know that Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001, following the collapse of the Soviet era. Now the SCO, being the successor to the Shanghai Five including China and Russia. In June 2017, it expanded to eight states, with India and Pakistan. Iran joined the group in July 2023, and Belarus in July 2024. Several countries are engaged as observers or dialogue partners.

Image: Ilham Aliyev (Licensed under CC BY 4.0)



With China, Iran, India and Russia in BRICS, they share the same security interest. Moreover, Azerbaijan and Belarus becoming BRICS members will fortify the SCO operations in the region. Our analytical studies further show unfolding remarkable opportunities with BRICS member countries for the next new members such as Azerbaijan and Belarus. Azerbaijan has an observer status according to Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry spokesperson **Aykhan**

Hajizada. Azerbaijan will probably become a full member of the SCO in a little while, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan **Kassym-Jomart Tokayev** said during his meeting with President of the Republic of Azerbaijan **Ilham Aliyev** on July 3 in Astana.

The floodgates for new members have since been opened: The association now includes the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, two of the world's biggest oil producers, and accounts for well over a quarter of the world's GDP. Azerbaijan is also an oil producer in the region, and it could also serve as a smooth conduit for Russia to access global markets.

Judging from the above discussion, and subsequent findings from several reports also offer logical implications if Azerbaijan and Belarus are accepted into BRICS. It provides solid conditions for building up common capabilities and approaches in the fight for economic power. This may likely entice Armenia and Kazakhstan also to take similar steps to become members of BRICS, whose economic benefits are enormous. For some reasons, BRICS could be a counterweight against U.S. economic hegemony in the global economic system.

BRICS, which traces its name to a Goldman Sachs report in 2001, has long struggled to find an economic or geopolitical purpose, as its member countries have little in common besides being large and non-Western. The BRICS association was created in 2006 by Brazil, Russia, India and China, with South Africa joining in 2011. On January 1, 2024, Egypt, Iran, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia became full members of the group. Russia is chairing the association this year. The main event, presentation of outstanding practical results, 2024 for BRICS during the summit on October 22-24, with a planned venue in Kazan, the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan.

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