Beyond the BRICS: Russian-Brazilian Relations since the collapse of the USSR

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For most of their modern history, Brazil and Russia saw each other as faraway overseas lands. In the twentieth century, this sense of remoteness found its expression in both countries, in the popular songs "Na dalekoy Amazonke" ("On the distant Amazon", a rough translation of Rudyard Kipling's verse from "Just So Stories") and Luiz Gonzaga's "Pagode Russo" ("Russian Pagode", based on a mix of Brazilian and Russian folk melodies). Interestingly, both songs combined lack of knowledge with positive attitude and even longing for the unknown. This has also been exemplified by the words "Will I see Brazil, Brazil, Brazil / Will I see Brazil till I am old?" ("Uvizhu li Braziliyu, Braziliyu, Braziliyu, / Uvizhu li Braziliyu do starosti moey?", in the original: "Roll down – roll down to Rio –/ Roll really down to Rio! / Oh, I'd love to roll to Rio / Some day before I'm old!") and "Yesterday I dreamed I was in Moscow, dancing the Russian "pagode" in a Cossack nightclub"

("Ontem eu sonhei que estava em Moscou / Dançando pagode russo na boate Cossacou") (Sagalovsky, 2011).

In the Soviet period (November 1917 – December 1991), a few thousand Russians went to Brazil. Most of them stayed, forming a politically fragmented diaspora, and never went back to the USSR. Even fewer Brazilians visited Russia; the majority of them were communists or sympathizers of the Soviet Union (Zabolotsky, 2007). We should add to them some students of the International Lenin's School (where Brazilians were one of the main parts of Latin American group), all of whom came to Moscow with false documents, but not as a part of independent trip (they were sent by the Communist Party of Brazil (*Partido Comunista do Brasil*) (Jeifets, 2016). Another key episode from the pre-war relations between two countries was Moscow's participation (via Comintern) in the preparation of the armed rebellion of the *Alianca Nacional Libertadora* led by L.C.Prestes in 1935. The rebellion failed, and became a serious obstacle to the contacts between the USSR and Brazil for some years.

The diplomatic relations between Brazil and the USSR were first established in 1945, at the end of the World War II, when the Allied coalition was still in existence. Then the relations were broken in 1947 and finally re-established in 1961. Since the latter date, Soviet-Brazilian political relations were relatively stable, but at the same time marginalized in comparison with the longstanding Russian-Cuban or Russian-Argentinian relationship. It is worth mentioning, however, that the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985) was not as vehemently criticized in Moscow as were the ruling regimes in Chile or Paraguay. Compared to other Latin American countries, Brazilian authoritarian regimes may indeed seem almost democratic. Political repression was relatively "mild", at least for Latin American standards. Besides, the military rulers demonstrated their will to transform the country into a great power. In the context of the Cold War, this objective did sometimes coincide with the aims of the Soviet Union. Some national projects in Brazil were economically unfeasible or ill-advised, for example, the construction of roads "from nowhere to nowhere" in the Amazon, but this was not too different from the Soviet experience. In the economic sphere, the Brazilian military encouraged the public sector, supported the development of national oil industry and the exports of military

equipment. In this context, Soviet machinery exports were tolerated and even welcomed where they were seen as competitive, as in the energy sector. Starting from 1963, several agreements and protocols on bilateral trade were signed. The "Brazilian economic miracle" was thus beneficial for Russian-Brazilian relations.

Since 1974, the "*apertura política*" (literally, "political opening") contributed to the growth of bilateral trade. It may be worth attention that General Ernesto Geisel, who started this somehow planned liberalization with his "responsible pragmatism" policy, was closely associated with state corporations and led the Petrobras oil corporation before his presidency. Petrobras was a company with a unique history. It was created in the 1950s as a direct result of the national campaign *O petróleo é nosso* ("The oil is ours") supported by President Getúlio Vargas. The president then committed suicide, but the company survived and practically became the symbol of Brazilian independence and sovereignty. The monopoly of the Petrobras came to an end in 1997, but it remained an embodiment of national pride until the recent corruption scandal.

Besides bilateral economic relations, there also were a few cases of mutual political understanding between Brazil and the Soviet Union. One of them was connected with the development of so called Lusophone states in Sub-Saharan Africa. Historically, all these countries and Brazil belonged to the same colonial empire. The Brazilian military regimes had certain sympathies towards the struggle for national independence in Portuguese colonies, even though they did not directly support Marxist liberation movements. On the other hand, the USSR supported these movements in all possible forms and advocated for them on the international arena. The coincidence in Soviet and Brazilian interests was most visible in Angola. In 1975, when the Portuguese colonialists left and the Cuban "internationalists" arrived, two different republics were proclaimed by warring movements. Brazil was then the first to recognize People's Republic of Angola which was supported by Cuba and the Soviet Union (Dávila, 2010). Additionally, the growing disaccordance between Brazil and the USA in the 1970s because of the development of Brazilian military program didn't pass unnoticed by Moscow as this fact was demonstrating the perspective of Brasilia's autonomous line of conduct in the international issues.

In spite of all coincidences and mutual interest, the relations between Brazil and the USSR did not develop into systematic partnership. In the economic sphere, the volume of bilateral trade remained fairly small and mostly "colonial". The Brazilian exports to the USSR included sugar, coffee and tobacco (meat was also added to this list by the 1970s), while the Soviet exports to Brazil included machinery and the "Lada" cars. In the late 1980s, even this modest relationship collapsed due to the economic and financial difficulties in the USSR. Meanwhile, Brazil returned to a democratic government and had to cope with her own problems of economic instability and foreign debt. In the case of the Soviet Union, it was not only an economic disaster, but also a political collapse of the state. In the last years of the USSR, the liberalization of economy and foreign trade opened the way for more Brazilian presence. In 1988, the Brazilian television, Globo TV, reached the Soviet audience with its "Isaura the Slave Girl" (*A Escrava Isaura*), a telenovela which gained popularity and brought at least one loanword, fazenda, as a synonym for dacha (summer house in the country) into the Russian language. In the same year an agreement was signed on the building of the Progress joint venture with Swedish and Brazilian capital in the Lipetsk region of Russia. The Progress was opened in 1990 and has been one of the most successful firms in the juice and baby food industry. However, in the turbulent process of post-Soviet mergers and acquisitions, the firm lost its foreign shareholders.

In the early 1990s, the post-Soviet Russian Federation was very far from the first league of Brazil's partners in the world. The foreign policy of Russia was weak and definitely pro-Western and tending to find a kind of an alliance with Washington. Brazil was then too far from the preoccupations of the new government in Moscow. The remaining economic contacts were mostly confined to supplies of turbines for the Brazilian energy sector. The only field where certain progress was visible was that of Russian brain drain to some Brazilian universities. Again, it should be stressed than the migration of Russian scholars started practically from zero and was rather small in numbers. They also had a problem of language. Under the Vargas regime in the 1930s, the teaching in any language but Portuguese was prohibited in Brazil, so that the immigrants from Europe could faster become part of the Brazilian nation. The results of this approach are visible even nowadays. The national system of secondary education, with

the exception of private schools, deteriorated after 1985, affording no attractive vacancies for foreign workforce. The absence of mandatory foreign language courses at the Brazilian universities, in contrast to post-Soviet Russia, also hindered the scholarly immigration, although this difficulty should not be exaggerated. In any case, this immigration did not result in a significant growth of bilateral relations, except a few projects of academic and inter-university partnership (Baryshev, 2011).

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the bi-polar system of international relations marked the beginning of the new era in the history of Russian-Brazilian relations. Since 1991, this relationship has remained underdeveloped and at the same time promising for both sides. Now, under various governments, Russia and Brazil saw each other as strategic partners.

Moscow visibly reacted to the growing independence of Latin American foreign policy demonstrated, among other things, by the declaration of the Rio Group during the bombings of Yugoslavia undertaken by NATO in 1999. The response of Russia marked a turning point in the Latin American policy of the Kremlin: in March 2003, President Vladimir Putin received representatives of the Rio Group in Moscow, later an agreement was reached on the development of regular contacts between Russia and the member countries of the Rio Group. In November 2004, the Russian president made an official visit to Brazil. Previously, in 2002, Brazilian President Fernando Cardoso had visited Russia, a year later, his successor Ignacio Lula da Silva did the same. The number of visits at the highest level was increasing (Jeifets, 2015).

Rather unexpectedly, the first decade of post-Soviet Russian history yielded excellent results for bilateral relations. This happened outside the main spheres of previous economic exchange and was mainly due to the growth of Brazilian meat exports to Russia. Such development was not totally unexpected. The Brazilian chicken had already entered the Soviet market before 1991, in the period of consumer goods deficit. Interestingly, they were initially marked in Arabic, indicating the original destination of the product. The direct exports were started by Sadia S.A. in 1989; this Brazilian corporation was then selling seventy types of products in forty countries. After the end of the USSR, Brazilian and other South American meat exporters saw Russia as a very promising market and were able to fight on it with

European and North American competitors. Brazilian meat exports to Russia were not always a success story. The quota system used in Russia led to the limitation of exports from Brazil between 2005 and 2007. Then the situation changed again. The already mentioned Sadia S.A. and Russia's Miratorg created a joint venture, Concordia Russia, registered in Cyprus as an offshore corporation with sixty per cent of Brazilian participation. In the enclave of Kaliningrad, they opened a meat processing plant aimed primarily at the internal Russian market which attracted around twenty per cent of Sadia's supplies abroad. This move was seen as a step towards more internationalization of Sadia S.A., and a very promising one, because twenty-five per cent of the production was to be consumed by the growing McDonalds in Russia (Dalla Costa & García, 2013: 3). However, only two years later the Brazilian participation in the project came to an end. The official explanation linked this decision with the losses of Sadia which had to merge with another Brazilian corporation, Perdigao S.A. Thus, the above mentioned story of the Progress joint venture was repeated in the meat industry. Nevertheless, the owners of the Kaliningrad plant have retained their Brazilian suppliers, now known as BRF Foods. Meanwhile, as stressed by the Russian side, "inspections at the Brazilian enterprises revealed weak control over veterinary and sanitary norms as determined by Customs Union law and Russian legislation". As a result, Rosselkhoznadzor, the federal service for veterinary and phytosanitary surveillance, imposed restrictions on the import of livestock production from 89 Brazilian meat processing factories in 2011; in 2012 there were 22 Brazilian enterprises on this list.[1] The beef trade between Brazil and Russia has also had environmental implications in both countries (Schierhorn; Meyfroidt; Kastner; Kuemmerle; Prishchepov & Müller 2016).

In 2014, the Russian embargo on European and North American meat imports led to renewed expectations for the Brazilian meat producers. These expectations have not fully materialized because of the economic slowdown in Russia. According to the 2014 statistics, Russia became the leading importer of Brazilian beef and pork (321.058 and 186.594 tonnes respectively). The sales of poultry also grew, although Russia was not among the top importers (Bruha, 2016). Rosselkhoznadzor also continued its practice of temporary ban on meat imports from Brazil (Abdulla, 2015).

In 2017, Brazil produced about 90 percent of pork and about one-third of beef imported to Russia, taking about 40 percent of Brazil's pork and 11 percent of beef exports. Both Russian and Brazilian agricultural bodies felt positive about bringing bilateral agricultural trade from US$ 5 billion to US$ 10 billion.[2] This optimistic view was undercut by the Russian ban of Brazilian pork and beef imports since December 2017. The ban meant that all this volume had to be sold elsewhere.[3] In the hope that the ban could be lifted soon, the Brazilian government opened the market to Russian wheat (still restricted to mills near ports). The analysts saw it as a potential blow to American wheat exports (Teixeira, 2018). However, the ban was not lifted by April 2018.

In the energy sector, the strengthening of bilateral relations was linked with the reforms of Russian economy and the creation of new corporations such as Power Machines ("Silovye machiny") and Rosneft. The Power Machines concern continued turbine exports to Brazil which had started in the 1970s. In that decade, the Soviet equipment was exported for the hydropower plants of Capivara and Sobradinho. In the post-Soviet period, the Power machines corporation supplied equipment for the hydropower plants of Porto Goes and Passo Sao Joao. In 2010 the Russian corporation opened an office in Sao Paulo. In 2015, seeing the Latin American markets as promising, Power Machines acquired a fifty one per cent stake in Fezer, a Brazilian company based in the state of Santa Catarina and specialized in woodworking machinery as well as hydro turbine components.[4] One more Russian corporation, Energomashexport , installed and launched two generators at Nova Aurora and two generators at Goyandira hydro power plants. [5]

Besides the hydropower plant equipment, the bilateral relations in the energy sector are still far from reaching the expectations of both countries. In 2007, Gazprom and Stroytransgaz signed memorandums of mutual understanding with Brazilian Petrobras on exploration, production, transportation and sales of hydrocarbons. In 2011, Gazprom opened its office in Rio de Janeiro.[6] The construction of a transcontinental gas pipeline was discussed, but the project did not advance. After many years of contacts between Petrobras and Russian oil and gas corporations, Rosneft was finally able to start oil exploration in Brazil. This move was made possible because of growing cooperation between Rosneft and Petrobras. The promising Solimões project in

the Amazon covers approximately 41 500 sq. km (16 license blocks). According to Rosneft, the project "establishes Rosneft in Brazil, a country with major upstream growth opportunities and synergies with Rosneft operations in Venezuela".[7] This achievement, combined with the presence of Petrobras in Russia, might herald a new stage in the development of partnership. However, the favorable business climate was soon overcast by the corruption crisis in Brazil as well as economic and financial difficulties in Russia.

The development of bilateral relations in the air and space sector has always look very promising. However, this was not the best example of success in Russian-Brazilian relations. It could seem that the basis for relationship in this field was guaranteed by the previous growth of Soviet industries. Unfortunately for Russia, national air industry all but collapsed in the 1990s. The space sector survived, even though it was plagued by several failures and unsuccessful reforms. The military air industries were also able to survive thanks to export contracts. In both spheres, the place of Brazil was apparently insignificant. There were a few events of great potential importance. Russia and Brazil concluded several agreements in the field of space cooperation. In 2006, the Brazilian astronaut Marcus Pontes flew to the International Space Station. Several Brazilian universities have participated in the joint research aimed at the expansion of the GLONASS navigation system in the country.[8] However, the level of cooperation has remained fairly low, especially in comparison with the relations between Russia's Roscosmos and the NASA.

In the military air sector, Russia secured several contracts for the delivery of helicopters (during the visit of Russia's Defense Minister, Serguei Shoigu, to Latin America). Russia also promised to sell to Brazil some anti-misile systems "Pantsyr-S" as well as Igla man-portable air-defense systems. According to Brazilian Web-portal G-1, Moscow proposed to Brasilia a plan of modernization of national anti-airstrikes defense (the sum of contract has to be up to 2.4 billions of US dollars). The Russians also promised to transfer some technologies to their Brazilian counter-part for subsequent re-export as Brazilian military production (Lima, 2013). At the moment, the Brazilian military airforces are armed with some Russian helicopters Mi-35M at the military base "Porto Velho" (Wiltgen, 2012). At the meeting

between the Presidents Dilma Rousseff and Vladimir Putin (2012) both countries signed the agreement about general conditions for providing Brazil with the KA-62 helicopters. At the first trimester of 201 7 of them were sent, however, the other part of equipment still is awaiting to be sent to South America.

On the other hand, Brazil fared well in the civil aviation industry. Since 2003, Embraer, the leading Brazilian company in the sector, started exporting its jets to Russia. The Brazilian air and space market attracted not only Russia, but also other European and post-Soviet states such as Ukraine. The Brazilian-Ukrainian cooperation in the field was also unsuccessful, while France has remained a major partner of Brazil. Moreover, the cooperation between Russia and the European Space Agency was also shaped by the role of France. The Russian-European cooperation is now centered on the space field of Courou in French Guyana, not too far from the Brazilian territory. This turn demonstrates that the cooperation with France has been more attractive for both Brazil and Russia than bilateral partnership. The reasons for such attractiveness may be both political and historical, shaped by the reputation of France in Latin America and post-Soviet Eurasia.

In the contrast to the Soviet period, Russian machinery supplies to Brazil have declined. Even in Russia's military exports, besides the already mentioned contracts for helicopter supplies, the place of Brazil has apparently remained small in comparison with most other partners. As in the air and space industries, the reasons for the relative insignificance of Russian-Brazilian relations in the military sphere may be linked with diverging international interests and previous partnership experience of both countries.

Brazil is Russia's major trading partner in Latin America and one of the leading suppliers of agricultural products, certain kinds of raw materials and consumption goods. The last tendencies in the development of bilateral economic relations between Russia and Brazil have been linked with the activities of Russian state companies interested in the growth of the GLONASS navigation system as well as the exports of equipment for nuclear power plants. Besides political and historical reasons, the main problem for Russia lies in the scarcity of possible supplies which would not compete with Brazil's own production.

From the Brazilian side, the development of economic relations in the last decades was more significant, as the general trend changed from "colonial" to machinery exports. Russia has been importing Brazilian spare parts for cars, agricultural machinery, medical instruments and even toothpaste made in Sao Paulo. As a result, Brazil nowadays occupies the first place in the bilateral trade between Russia and Latin American countries. On the contrary, the role of Russia in the trade of Brazil is growing, but not as significantly as expected.

As a convenient symbol of ups and downs in the economic relations between Russia and Brazil, one can also look at the tourism industry. There have been several attempts to make Brazil more attractive for Russian tourists and vice versa. However, until now the reciprocal flows have remained insignificant. The direct flights between Moscow and Río de Janeiro, which were regular in the Soviet period, were resumed in 2011, but this experiment did not last. Moreover, the Transaero company which made this attempt, recently went bankrupt.

The economic relations between Russia and Brazil since 1991 have been mostly driven by mutual interest of Russian and Brazilian companies. Little in this field has been directly related to the input of the Brazilian or Russian diasporas. The former is tiny and practically insignificant in terms of political and economic influence. The latter does not form a uniform community, mainly due to historical reasons. The first sizable migration from Russia to Brazil took place before 1917. It included such diverse groups as the Poles, Finns, Russian Jews and the Germans from the Volga area. All these groups have retained their individual character, but none of them had a special sense of affinity with the Soviet Union. The next wave of migration was the result of the civil war in Russia, then followed another wave which mostly consisted of the so called DPs ("displaced persons") of various ethnic origins who came to Brazil via Western Europe. Parallel with the DPs, some Russians including several Old Believer communities, moved to Brazil from China. For all these groups, the center of attraction lied elsewhere, either in Argentina or in USA. All of them formed their own transnational networks with no reference to the Soviet Union. By the end of the USSR, the other migration, mainly, but not only, Jewish, was added to the previous waves for different reasons. Some of the new migrants reached Brazil after a stay in USA, e.g. in search for

a better health care. Since the late 1980s, the last wave of migration came, this time not necessarily a permanent one. Only the last group of migrants has direct interest and contacts with Russia. Some of them have contributed to the growth of bilateral relations, but none could be seen as a leading figure or company in the field, in a striking contrast to the Chinese migrants and companies abroad.

Brazil is one of the countries where the programs aimed at the population of Russian descent (*sootechestvenniki*) were started in the 2000s. The success of such programs remains dubious, mainly due to the already mentioned complexity of Russian and Russian-speaking diaspora in Brazil (Gonobobleva, et.al., 2008).

In the general Russian view of Brazil, this is "a country of dancing mulatto women and soccer virtuosos" (Sakhno, 2013). For some scholars and politicians, the Russian-Brazilian partnership

> "has a good moral and psychological, historical and civilizational as well as geopolitical foundation in the similarity of the Russian and Brazilian character, long-term separateness of their historical and geographical existence (combined with their genuine interest in each other, which was partly stimulated by this), the richness and compatibility of their cultures, etc." (Martynov, 2008).

This view is probably as romanticized as that of dancing mulattoes and the like. Nevertheless, the view of Brazil as an "American Russia" is not rare (Maia, 2005). The cultural links between Brazil and Russia have existed since the early twentieth century. Unlike the economic and political relations, these connections were cultivated by some members of various ethnic Russian, Russian Jewish and Volga German diasporas. These people did not only read Russian, but they also translated a lot from Russian literature. It is thus not surprising that the sociological survey conducted in 2006 by the Institute of Latin America of the Russian Academy of Sciences revealed that almost all the interviewed recognized Russian classical culture as a great one, and with "universal significance" (Martynov, 2006). Russia was not too different from other countries where the Brazilian television production and martial arts have become more and more recognizable. On the contrary, it seems that no recent additions to Russia's cultural presence in Brazil have been as prominent. The place of the classical literature, ballet and

vodka has remained unchallenged until now, even though none of these products fully represents modern post-Soviet Russia.

Both economically and culturally, Russia and Brazil do share some common features, but they also differ a lot. As concerns national economy, Russia is much more decentralized than Brazil. The only exception, albeit a significant one, is the financial sector, which is still rather underdeveloped and more state-protected than in the other countries with similar transit economies. In Brazil, single states are politically stronger and economically much more diverse than Russia's regions (except for some of the republics inside the Russian Federation). This diversity reflects itself in the results of Brazilian elections. The presidencies of Lula and Dilma were marked by the outright opposition of more affluent states and their voters. What is even more important, the state of Sao Paulo alone concentrates in itself about a half of Brazilian economy, and in several industries this concentration has a tendency to reach one hundred per cent. Thus, Brazilian-Russian economic relations almost amount to the relationship between the whole of Russia and the single state of Sao Paulo. On the contrary, Brazilian cultural landscape is more varied. In some aspects, this landscape is even more diverse than that of Russia. This is why, for instance, it is not surprising that the only ballet school of Moscow's Bolshoi Theater abroad was open in Joinville, Santa Catarina (in 2000), rather than Sao Paulo or Brasilia, as the capital of the country.

The story of Bolshoi in Joinville is interesting in itself, as it presented a combination of private initiative and state support. In 1995, Alexander Bogatyrev, the interim artistic head of the Bolshoi Theater, tried to expand the presence of the Bolshoi abroad. In 1996, during a tour in Brazil, the Russian artists went to Joinville where they took part in the annual dance festival and were impressed by the hospitality of the audience, including the official level. Then Bogatyrev suggested that a Bolshoi school could be established in the city. Despite Bogatyrev's death in 1998, the contacts continued, indicating a real interest from the Brazilian side. Finally, in 1999, at the opening of the dance festival, Alla Mikhalchenko from the Bolshoi Theater and the authorities of Joinville signed a memorandum of understanding on the creation of a ballet school. The school was then supported by the governments of both countries. The case of the ballet school in Joinville has remained

a unique case of a successful project in bilateral cultural relations. The school explained the success by a "profound connection of the city with dance because of its traditional annual festival", as well as the personal role of Luiz Henrique da Silveira who was then the mayor of Joinville.[9] Very little was said of the official Russian participation in the process, although the Bolshoi is a state-run theater. This is especially interesting if one compares the school's own biography with the official stance of the Russian side. In 2015, at the Seventh meeting of the Russian-Brazilian High-Level Commission on Cooperation in Moscow, the Russian Prime-Minister Dmitry Medvedev highly praised the Joinville school as a "special landmark project". As put by Medvedev, "this year marks the 15th anniversary of the Bolshoi Theatre's only foreign ballet school, located in the Brazilian city of Joinville. This is a one-of-a-kind project and the crown jewel of Russian-Brazilian cooperation and friendship. We discussed ways to promote such projects. We may open a club for sambo, a Russian martial art, in Brazil under the same arrangements".[10] It would be logical to mention capoeira in this context as an example which could be imitated. This was not done, maybe because the spread of Brazilian martial art in Russia stemmed from private initiative and did not ask for state support.

Any up-to-date analysis of Russian-Brazilian relations would be incomplete without the mention of the BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa). Since 2003, the idea of BRIC (then BRICS) became popular in Russia. From the Brazilian perspective, this idea was intertwined with the home-made concept of IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa). As a matter of fact, if the idea of economic convergence between these countries was something new, there was a much deeper basis for both abbreviations. Among this kind of future "multi-letter unions" discussed in Brazil one could also find BRAC (Brazil, Russia, Australia and China) etc., but in the long run most of similar ideas looked like the return to the "globalization before globalization" of the Portuguese Descobrimentos. That era had a very important component, the famous road to India which started from Europe, then went to the future Brazil, then to South Africa and from the Cape towards India and finally to East Asia. This road disappeared in the nineteenth century, but the modern growth in the Pacific Ocean Rim practically produce a new version of the old connection, comparable to the Silk Road across Eurasia.

From this perspective, the BRIC and BRICS should not be treated as an opposition to the North. However, from the Russian point of view, the idea of BRICS had some more recent associations connected with the idea of a triangle (Soviet Russia, then USSR, plus China and India) which would challenge the global capitalism. This idea had nothing to do with the IBSA-BRICS model which is seemingly gaining ground now. How they will build this system, in which the main course, will be Brazil. At the same time, there have been certain tendencies which might be seen as leading to a kind of international polarization involving the whole BRICS group. An often overlooked element of this change was connected with the so called "Heiligendamm Process", the high-level dialogue of G8 (then together with Russia) with Brazil, India, China, Mexico and South Africa. This initiative was elaborated at the summit of Heiligendamm in June 2007. The idea was to reach joint responsibility of all mentioned countries, especially in the programs of assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa. Russia's presence in the Heiligendamm Process was problematic from the very start. By the time G8 was reconstituted without Russia in 2014, nobody even remembered that this move meant the symbolic end of the joint Africa-related initiative. Rather, Russia and the other BRICS states were much more similar in their approach to resource-rich African countries than Europe, North America and Japan.

The Russian expert in Latin American and Brazilian studies Boris Martynov is pointing to the importance of the global positioning of such countries as Russia, Brazil, China and India (which does not depend from their democratic development, but is based on their capability/incapability to effectively control their own territory). He also stressed the importance of cooperation in *the energy and the ecological spheres and especially in the outer space* (Martynov, 2009). There are other views on the perspectives of the BRICS. If one does not take into account the politically-motivated response in the media, there are a few more thoughtful scholarly commentaries. One such example is the article written by Michael Kahn and dealing with the BRICS declarations and realities in the sphere of science, technology and innovations (Kahn, 2015).

The political nature of the interaction between Russia and Brazil was highlighted in March 2014, when this South American nation abstained

from voting for the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly that criticized Moscow for the annexation of the Crimean peninsula; the same did the other BRICS members. Both countries have their own reasons for mutual political audacity, for Brasilia it is very important, in addition, that Moscow supports (unlike China, its other partner country in BRICS) explicitly the candidacy of Brazil for a permanent position in the Security Council of the UN (Ellis, 2015: 60).

However, despite the signing of the historic strategic alliance between Russia and Brazil in October 2005 and strengthening cooperation between the two nations in such areas as oil extraction, the development of outer space and the aerospace industry, import of Russian arms to Brazil and the export of significant quantities of meat and other agricultural products to Russia, the status of bilateral relations is much lower than that of Brazil and China. As Brazilian analyst indicates, the media in Brazil and China pay much more attention to the observation of cooperation activities between two countries compared to what can be read in the press about Russian-Brazilian interaction, and BRICS didn't change the situation (Ehrmann, 2016).

At the 5th BRICS Summit in South Africa in March 2013, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff stated that her country had welcomed the participation of Chinese companies in the construction of large telecommunications and transport facilities in Brazil, promoting cooperation between the financial institutions of both countries. This same summit gave a good boost to increase cooperation between the BRICS and Africa, where the priority area of tripartite cooperation between Brazil, China and South Africa focused on the agricultural sector. Within the BRICS frameworks, China, Russia and Brazil had the opportunity to carry out several joint economic projects, which were reaffirmed at the Ufa summit in Russia in July 2015, in the document called "Cooperation Roadmap" commercial, economic and investment sphere until 2020, whose implementation is aimed at strengthening the complementarity among the economies of the countries of the group, allowing the use of common resources and reserves more broadly, increasing the flow of goods and financial capital (BRICS, 2015).

A year earlier, in July 2014, at the BRICS summit in Fortaleza, Russia, like other members of the BRICS, had offered $ 10 billion in seed capital for the establishment of a new Bank of the BRICS; however,

this proposal could not be compared with the generous suggestions of Beijing. Russia also expressed interest in joining the Inter-American Development Bank (whose member is Brazil) (Ellis, 2015: 10), although to date this proposal has not been fulfilled.

A superfluous analysis of trade relations within the BRICS group reveals that the dynamics of trade between Brazil and China or Brazil and India are better than those of Brazil and Russia (in the latter case, trade represents only 1% of the total volume).

Even during the presidency of Dilma Rousseff the policy of strengthening BRICS was among Brasilia's priorities in the same place as the challenge of signing a large-scale trade agreement with the European Union. Nowadays, with the political changes in the government of that country and the orientation open to neoliberal models in order to save the economy that had sunk in the crisis, BRICS relations are surviving a complicated period, above all, when it comes to relations between Brasilia and Moscow.

Thus, the Brazilian press does not contain news about the implementation of the aforementioned agreement on the purchase of new missiles "land to air" made in Russia, despite previous announcements that deliveries were made throughout 2016.

The government of Michel Temer who assumed power after the final dismissal of Dilma Roussef during the impeachment, does not cancel the participation of his country in the BRICS, however, focuses these relations more towards contacts with China and India (Stuenkel, 2016B); Chancellor José Serra's statement left very little room for political speculation - foreign policy would have to be new and cease to be "driven by ideology" (Stuenkel, 2016A).

These changes in Brazilian foreign policy coincide with the deterioration of the situation in the BRICS countries. The qualification "trash" recently attributed to the largest African economy, that of South Africa, raises again the question of how emerging and advanced are the economies of the group. Above all, because the difficulties experienced by that country, are not alien to other members of the denomination. While in the ranking of perceptions of corruption of "Transparency International", South Africa ranks 61st, Brazil is in the 76th place, more

or less the same positions have India and China, and Russia occupies the still lower position, the 119th place (of 175 countries in total). According to estimates made by Standard & Pools, Brazil now has a sovereign rating on the BB with negative forecasts, Russia was assigned a rating - BB +, the forecast is also negative. In the Russia-Brazil-China triangle, only China has an AA rating, but a negative forecast is also maintained (Falyahov, 2016).

It should be noted that unlike the governments of Fernando Cardoso, Lula Ignacio da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, the current cabinet of Brazil - by formally maintaining this priority of diplomacy - does not perform it nor implement it to the same extent as the previous authorities. It is more focused on the economic resolution of the national crisis than on the political component of the BRICS, so it would draw from this group, above all, the advantages of bilateral trade and investment. In this regard, China has the obvious preference over Russia for the volume of resources invested. Despite some slowdown in the Chinese economy, it is expected to continue growing around 6% in 2017; India, in turn, can grow even faster; both would contribute, according to the calculations of the International Monetary Fund, more than 40% of the increase of the world economy (while the United States would only do it to the extent of 10%) (Stuenkel, 2016B). It is of great importance for Brazil to be a founding member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIb) and the Development Bank of the BRICS, since both became important signs of Brazil's global strategic presence in the first decade of the 21st century. The aforementioned institutions demonstrate a significant shift towards Asia.

The error made by Serra in November 2016 is very spectacular when, listing the members of the BRICS, he did not refer to South Africa, but he mentioned Argentina (Vieira & Menezes, 2016). Brasilia is gradually trying to abandon "South-South" politics by promoting more bilateral relations than pluri-regional ones. In this aspect also Beijing has more possibilities than Moscow. It is quite probable that due to the crisis the authorities of Brasilia did not insist so much on the development of relations with Russia, while the Kremlin will have to revise several contracts previously agreed with Brazil, especially in the sphere of defense. Right now we can see some kind of revision of agreements on China's massive investments in the Argentine economy.

However, in Brasilia the Chinese can feel more calm, while the Russians are running into more investment and commercial risks.

A Chinese and Russian tool to save Brazil's role in the BRICS in this complicated period for trilateral relations could be the operation of the BRICS New Development Bank that began operating in 2016 and could serve as a source of investment in the Brazilian economy which is awaiting massive structural reforms and privatizations. However, this tool would still have to be better edged.

Whether the BRICS will remain attractive to all the "abbreviated" countries, is still to be seen. It may turn out that it will be difficult to disband an association which has been than to create it. The declared strategic partnership did not convert into the strengthening of economic ties, but at least it did demonstrate its importance in the rime of need for Russia, especially since 2014 (Stuenkel, 2014).

Nowadays, Russian-Brazilian relations may be described as a rather patchy political and economic partnership, with a few points of growth. One of them, definitely unplanned, appeared in the social networking industry and was linked to VKontakte, later re-branded as VK.

In 2013 Elena Trost, who studied digital marketing in the then four BRIC countries, wrote:

> "The mission of this social network, created in 2006 by Pavel Durov, is to help people to express their opinions and to find an audience. VKontakte is providing a communication platform to engage with a broad community of interesting people or keep in touch with friends and family. The aim is to remain the fastest, most modern and aesthetically pleasing means of communicating on the Internet. Since it represents striking similarities with Facebook. VKontakte is often seen as a so called "copycat" or even "Facebook clone". However, with more than 110 million registered users, VKontakte represents the most popular online social network in Russia, with over 70% of the registered users active in this country. This SNS is the most visited resource in the Russian Internet, enjoying growing popularity Additional users mainly come from other CIS States (Commonwealth of Independent States). With an availability of different languages, VKontakte aims to expand to other countries".

In an interview to Trost, Jorge Junior, a marketing analyst at BMW in Brazil, said: "In the past, the most important social media network was Orkut, but now it's Facebook. Facebook is ahead of Orkut. Facebook has much more people and more and more are getting connected on Facebook also with their mobile phones, so always being there" (Trost, 2013: 343). The death of the Orkut network in 2014 resulted in the migration of its customers to Vkontakte.

According to Harrison Weber, Orkut's users then preferred VK to Google+ or Facebook: "VK is dwarfed by Facebook's 1.28 billion monthly active users, yet the company is clearly growing in Brazil, even if it only ended up with Orkut's scraps" (Weber, 2014). The reasons for this choice were connected with the similarity between Orkut and VKontakte, especially in their way of profile and forum creation, as well as a certain level of privacy, apparently missing in Facebook (Soares, 2014). In February 2016 there were more than 1 million users of VK in Brazil. This event was celebrated by the company, which invited all the registered users to post the photos of Brazil with the hashtag *#MostreseuBrasil*.[11]

The success of VK has been largely overlooked in Russia and abroad, as it contradicted the tendency to the fragmentation of social networks. In 2015, a report of The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies stressed that "Chinese internet users use different platforms than Europeans who, together with many others, mainly use American internet platforms. Russians (VKontakte) and Brazilians (Orkut) use yet other social networks, albeit that Orkut is in decline at the moment. This gives rise to the question of whether these social networks really promote exchange of information across borders of countries and social groups, or whether they in fact reinforce existing communities, moving them from offline to online" (De Spiegeleire, 2015: 63). The report included a reference to Weber's article on the shift from Orkut to VK without any commentaries. Neither did any official publication in Russia paid attention to this success story, maybe because it had nothing to do with the state-sponsored programs of bilateral cooperation. Meanwhile, it is to be expected that the growth of VK in Brazil will contribute to the strengthening of contacts between numerous Russian and Brazilian users of this social network.

Outside Russia and Latin America, if one does not count the ongoing media coverage of bilateral visits and trade, the scholarly research on

the relations between Russia and Brazil is almost non-existent. A rare exception is an article by Matthew Michaelides, who analyzed the military-technical relations between Russia and Brazil and saw them as an example of informal patronage politics from the Russian side (Michaelides, 2014). In a recent work on Russia and Brazil, including the history of bilateral relations, Yvette Sánchez and Claudia Franziska Brühwiler mentioned the phrases "polar Brazil" (coined by former President Fernando Henrique Cardoso) and "tropical Russia" (used by Vladimir Tyurdeneev, the Russian consul in Rio de Janeiro) as an expression of similarity between two countries, but then stressed the differences between them, especially in cross-cultural communications (Brühwiler & Sánchez, 2016).

The findings of Sánchez and Brühwiler may be relevant to the future of bilateral relations between Russia and Brazil. While the mutual strategic interest will remain stable notwithstanding any political changes in both countries, the contacts between Russian and Brazilian companies will develop independently from the bilateral agreements and will, in way, resemble or be part of shadow economy in both countries. As for the cultural relations, geography will matter in the foreseeable future.

These conclusions have once again been proved by the dramatic events connected with the political change in Brazil since 2016 and a growing risk of a full-scale conflict between Russia and the West.

On August 31, 2016 the Brazilian Senate voted to convict Rousseff, thus making Vice President Michel Temer Brazil's new president, even though Dilma Rousseff retained her political rights (Rattinger, 2018:129). At the first sight, it could be expected that President Temer would dustbin the ties between Brazil and Russia in favor of a closer relationship with the USA. The real picture was, however, more nuanced. The new government did stress the importance of relations with the Northern partner, especially on Venezuela. In May 2017, Brazil applied for joining the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This application was not uniformly supported by the Ministry of Finance, while the position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was more ambiguous (Barrocal, 2017). Meanwhile, the relations with the BRICS, where the locomotive role belonged to China, did not diminish. President Temer visited Russia in June 2017. According to the Brazilian observers, Brazil is now in a weaker position to deal with Russia (Maretti, 2017).

However, the decline in bilateral relations began to repair in 2017. The total volum of Russian investment in this country reached 1.5 thousand of billions (mostly in the sphere of energy supplies). Both countries increased their cooperation in space area, railways, GPS orientation systems, etc. Even more important, as Yakovlev says, is that the Russian export becomes more 'contemporary' and the percent of high technologies is increasing in the export toward Brazil (Yakovlev, 2017: 12). During Temers's visit to Moscow, both Presidents affirmed their will to enforce the strategic dialogue in the international relations, including the BRICS and the UN formats. However, one can note that Brasilia is more interested now to seek Russia's support in the struggle against new protectionism (in the US, etc.), and it is not so ready to demonstrate the alliance with Russia in some issues of vital significance for Kremlin (such as crisis in Syria and so on).

The political change in Brazil has included a more active involvement of the military, something unheard of since 1980s. The reserve army general Luiz Gonzaga Schroeder Lessa, probably the most vocal opponent of a habeas corpus for Lula, referred to the risk of "fratricidal struggle", if the Federal Supreme Court (STF) allowed the former president to be free and stand for the 2018 election. According to the general, "It is the duty of the Armed Forces to restore order. But I do not think we will get there" (Godoy, 2018). Even though the military interpreted this threat as Lessa's personal opinion, the general atmosphere became tense, especially after the tweets against "impunity" posted by the Brazilian Army commander General Eduardo Villas Boas (Cantanhêde, 2018). The habeas corpus was then denied by the Federal Supreme Court (in a vote of 6 to 5).

If the military have now become more interested in Brazilian politics, this would not automatically imply that they would be strongly biased against any cooperation with Russia. It has already been mentioned before that even in the times of the military dictatorship in Brazil, there was no direct confrontation with the former Soviet Union. The Brazilian military rulers were nationalist rather than pro-Western in their foreign policy. Of course, this kind of nationalism did not include tolerance towards various Communist movements, even less to the 'terrorists' such as Dilma Rousseff and her comrades in arms. Neither Dilma nor Lula could generate much sympathy from the veterans of military rule.

An interesting comparison of the situation in Brazil and Russia in the last few years may be found in the publications of Kenneth Rapoza and Oliver Stuenkel. According to Rapoza, a Forbes columnist,

> "Russia and Brazil have a lot in common. It's not something to brag about.
>
> Both are blockbuster commodity exporters. They have a penchant for big government. Even their airports have that same doorbell chime before public announcements are made. Both are dealing with a serious political crisis, and corruption is endemic in the system. One is in slightly better shape than the other.
>
> […] If Washington, London, Berlin or Paris had to pick between the two presidents, Temer would win in a landslide. Ask Brazilians who'd they prefer, and they'd probably tell you Putin."

This correlates with another statement by Rapoza, "From an investing standpoint, there is more domestic political risk in Brazil than there is in Russia. Russia's political risk is from the West" (Rapoza, 2017).

It is in this context that Oliver Stuenkel, a German-Brazilian scholar in international relations, has studied the recent relations between two countries under Temer and Putin. Stuenkel suggested that "despite strong ties to the U.S. and Europe – symbolized, for example, by Temer's decision to apply for OECD membership – Brazil should not be expected to take sides if tensions between Russia and the West intensify, regardless of who succeeds Temer in January." He argued that "Brazil's decision not to criticize Russia reveals its uncertain position in the changing global order". This argument does not look plausible; in the same article, Stuenkel noticed:

> "In many ways, Brazil's strategy is not new. Both during the Cold War and even during the so-called unipolar moment in the 1990s, when Washington was globally dominant, former Brazilian Presidents Fernando Collor, Itamar Franco and Fernando Henrique Cardoso shied away from fully siding with Washington" (Stuenkel, 2018).

Brazil is not a staunch adherent of Russia's foreign policy, not could it be an abiding junior ally of the USA. Geopolitical considerations

matter, and the position of Brazil is less "uncertain" than inclined to a stable balance between major global actors whatever they are. This approach has a long history, and there is no reason to think that changing it would be beneficial to the Brazilian state.

The current level of bilateral relations is seen positively by both Russia and Brazil. According to the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

> "Brazil and Russia have converging positions on many topics of the international agenda, sharing the firm belief that it is necessary to reform the global governance structures, in order to build an institutional architecture more consistent with the contemporary world".

The Ministry's view also stresses the importance of the BRICS and its cooperation projects, as well as bilateral cultural cooperation and a short term visa exemption.[12] Stuenkel, in his article on current Russian-Brazilian relations, also noticed:

> "A rare visa waiver program, which makes a Brazilian passport more valuable for travelers arriving at the Moscow airport than does any European equivalent, remains in place" (Stuenkel, 2018).

This view has been supported by Brazilian and Russian tourists, even though the program in question is not as rare as Stuenkel thought. However, in spite of all the benefits of the visa agreement, the bilateral tourist flows are highly likely to remain stable, as the economic situation in both countries and the international context (in Russia's case) are still unfavorable for offline intercultural communication between Russian and Brazilian citizens.

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Abstract

Beyond the BRICS: Russian-Brazilian Relations since the collapse of the USSR

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the bi-polar system of international relations marked the beginning of the new era in the history of Russian-Brazilian relations. Since 1991, Russia and Brazil have seen each other as strategic partners. A symbol of this partnership is the participation of both countries in the BRICS club, which also includes India, China and South Africa.

Independently from the bilateral agreements, the contacts between Russian and Brazilian companies have been rather patchy, with a few success stories, exemplified by the growth of Brazilian meat exports to Russia, undercut by the Russian ban of Brazilian pork and beef imports since December 2017. Another interesting example of cooperation took place in the social networking industry and was linked to the success of the VKontakte (VK) network in Brazil.

Resumen

Más allá de los BRICS: relaciones ruso-brasileñas desde el colapso de la URSS

La desintegración de la Unión Soviética y el fin del sistema bipolar de relaciones internacionales marcó el comienzo de una nueva era en la historia de las relaciones ruso-brasileñas. Desde 1991, Rusia y Brasil se han considerado mutuamente socios estratégicos. Un símbolo de esta asociación es la participación de ambos países en el club BRICS, que también incluye a India, China y Sudáfrica.

Independientemente de los acuerdos bilaterales, los contactos entre las empresas rusas y brasileñas han sido bastante irregulares, con algunos casos de éxito como, por ejemplo, el crecimiento de las exportaciones brasileñas de carne a Rusia, socavadas por la prohibición rusa a la importación de carne de cerdo y res de Brasil desde diciembre de 2017. Otro ejemplo interesante de cooperación se dio en la industria de las redes sociales y estuvo relacionado con el éxito de la red VKontakte (VK) en Brasil.

Summario

Para além do BRICS: relações russo-brasileiras a partir do colapso da URSS

A desintegração da União Soviética e o fim do sistema bipolar de relações internacionais marcou o começo de uma nova era na história das relações russo-brasileiras. A partir de 1991, Rússia e Brasil passaram a se considerar mutuamente sócios estratégicos. Um símbolo dessa associação é a participação de ambos os países no chamado BRICS, grupo que também inclui Índia, China e África do Sul.

Independente dos acordos bilaterais, os contatos entre as empresas russas e brasileiras têm sido bastante irregulares, com alguns casos bem sucedidos, como, por exemplo, o crescimento das exportações brasileiras de carne à Rússia, socavadas, porém, pela proibição russa à importação de carnes suína e bovina do Brasil vigente desde dezembro de 2017. Outro exemplo interessante de cooperação ocorreu na indústria das redes sociais, caso relacionado com o êxito da rede VKontakte (VK) no Brasil.