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CONCEPT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S PRESIDENCY IN BRICS IN 2015-2016

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Created at the initiative of the Russian leadership in 2006, the intergovernmental association of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) quickly became a significant factor in world politics and the global economy. BRICS is both a symbol of a growing trend towards a multipolar world and the main driver of this trend. The commitment to strengthen BRICS in all dimensions, as outlined in the Concept of the

Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation and in the concept of our country's participation in this association, is one of the key elements of Russian foreign policy.

A long-term objective of the Russian Federation in BRICS and, accordingly, a consistent goal of its presidency of the association is the gradual transformation of BRICS from a dialogue forum and a tool for coordinating positions on a limited range of issues into a full-scale mechanism for strategic and day-to-day cooperation on key issues of world politics and the global economy. This objective will be achieved by consistently expanding the range of cooperation areas, actively promoting the common interests of BRICS countries on the international scene, and creating an extensive system of mechanisms for cooperation, primarily in the financial and economic sphere, which will gradually evolve into concrete institutions. All this is intended to raise BRICS to the level of an important element of the global governance system in the 21st century.

The key objectives of Russia's BRICS Presidency are as follows:

- to strengthen the position of BRICS and, on this basis, to solidify the political and economic positions of our country in the international arena;
- to promote solutions to the most pressing international political issues which represent a priority for Russia and its BRICS partners (regional conflicts, fighting international terrorism and the drug threat, countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction), based on consolidated approaches of the five member countries;
- to bolster the positions of BRICS in the international system by expanding the association's external relations, including in Eurasia, and ensuring their stability;
- to achieve tangible progress in reforming the international monetary and financial system, primarily the IMF, with the support of BRICS;
- to further develop multilateral financial cooperation within the framework of BRICS, including the full launch of the New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement of BRICS countries;
- to identify entirely new areas of BRICS cooperation, such as parliamentary affairs, culture, information and youth;
- to promote initiatives aimed at improving the governance of BRICS and implement practical measures that will lead to the gradual formation of institutions for the association;
- to enhance the efficiency of BRICS by improving the reporting process for previous commitments assumed by member countries.

Specific priorities of Russia's Presidency are as follows:

1. Strengthening the international political positions of Russia and BRICS

BRICS has become an influential collective participant in global politics, with its own voice on some key issues of international peace and security. Regional conflicts (Syria, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Afghanistan, conflicts in Africa) and international information security are the areas where cooperation has advanced the farthest.

But more progress can be made on this front. BRICS partners still have limited experience of practical cooperation in the "five-country" format. Working mechanisms for multilateral cooperation are insufficiently developed.

In these circumstances, the practical tasks of Russia's Presidency in the sphere of international politics are as follows:

- developing comprehensive cooperation in the UN, including countering attempts by individual countries to impose on the international community policies aimed at overthrowing "undesirable" regimes and to advance unilateral solutions to conflicts by means of sanctions and military force;
- developing close cooperation among BRICS countries in order to strengthen the rule of international law in global affairs and counter trends leading to the erosion of fundamental principles of international law and the arbitrary interpretation of the UN Charter and UN Security Council resolutions;
- enhancing the soft power of BRICS by coordinating practical approaches of the member countries to international development assistance.

To achieve these objectives, the Russian side proposes substantially expanding the existing cooperation mechanism by introducing the practice of consultations on specific regional conflicts and topical issues of international law.

2. Advancing Russia's national security interests and BRICS' common security interests, strengthening international security

BRICS has developed an efficient mechanism of dialogue between senior representatives of the member countries responsible for national security. During Russia's Presidency, this mechanism should be used to achieve the following objectives:

- to coordinate the positions of the BRICS countries on strategic stability, international and regional security, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, settlement of regional conflicts and the maintenance of regional stability;
- to strengthen cooperation in combating transnational terrorist groups. The consolidation of the BRICS countries against the threats of international terrorism, emanating from the hotbeds of local wars and armed conflicts (Syria, Afghanistan), shall be of primary importance;
- to make BRICS a collective leader in the global community on strengthening international information security (IIS), internationalizing Internet governance, and developing the rules of responsible behavior of states in cyberspace. IIS is one of the key priorities of Russia's Presidency. Cooperation between the BRICS countries in this area should be placed on a practical footing and a solid legal basis in the form of the intergovernmental agreement of the BRICS member countries on IIS-related cooperation. It is essential to work towards the development of such an agreement within the BRICS Expert Working Group on Security in the Use of ICT.

Cooperation with BRICS partners outside the framework of the dialogue of the senior representatives of member countries responsible for national security should continue at the UN and other international forums to promote the proposals of the five countries on transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities, as well as the draft treaty on prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space and of the threat or use of force against outer space objects.

Joint efforts to fight drug trafficking - a growing problem for all participants of the association - should be a major area of cooperation with the BRICS partners. In addition

to a regular meeting of the heads of anti-drug agencies, which will be held during Russia's Presidency, efforts should be made to create a related working group.

3. Promoting the interests of Russia and BRICS in the development of multilateral financial cooperation, reforming the International Monetary and Financial System (IMFS) and ensuring strong, sustainable and balanced growth

Long-term cooperation among BRICS partners on international financial and economic matters will remain a key area of work, considering its great importance for ensuring financial stability and economic security.

Priority tasks in this sphere are as follows:

- qualitatively improving efforts to coordinate the positions of BRICS partners on the G20 agenda during the chairmanship of Turkey (2015) and the People's Republic of China (2016) on the basis of the decisions adopted by the G20 St. Petersburg Summit (September 2013).

The top priorities here are as follows: promoting reforms in international financial institutions, above all the IMF; implementing the Framework for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth, including the implementation of "comprehensive growth strategies" and minimisation of adverse "side effects" of the normalisation of monetary policy in developed countries; establishing a common position of BRICS countries regarding the consequences suffered by their economies from the phasing out of unconventional monetary policies by the USA and other developed countries;

- launching the full-scale work of the New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement;

- adoption of measures by BRICS countries to increase availability of public financial services, as well as strengthening the protection of rights of consumers of such services and increasing financial literacy among the population;

- greater coordination with BRICS partners in the context of the implementation of the Action Plan on Tax Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) and examination of possible steps to de-offshore national economies.

Other new, topical issues can be discussed, provided there is mutual interest. These may include sharing best practices on forming national payment systems and improving the work of credit rating agencies.

4. Using the capacities of BRICS to diversify the foreign economic ties of Russia, strengthen its economic security, and reinforce the foundations of the multipolar world order in the economic sphere

In the context of increasing turbulence in global markets, intensified international competition and the expanding practice of imposing unilateral economic sanctions, it is more important than ever to launch "internal" economic cooperation within the framework of BRICS. Such cooperation will enable BRICS countries to take advantage of the mutual complementarity of their economies, as well as reduce the existing vulnerabilities to unfavorable international trends.

Therefore, the priority objectives for Russia's BRICS Presidency are as follows:

- to coordinate the positions of BRICS countries in the WTO on issues where the partners' approaches align (support for the multilateral trade system, rapid completion of the Doha

round of WTO negotiations, transparency when concluding regional trade agreements, etc.);

- to take active measures to come to an agreement with the partners on the draft BRICS Strategy for Economic Partnership as a key tool for promoting multilateral business cooperation for the purposes of accelerating the social and economic development of BRICS countries and increasing their competitiveness in the world economy;

- to encourage the practice of mutual settlement of accounts in national currencies and develop relevant foreign transaction mechanisms;

- to use the capacities of sectorial interaction formats, the BRICS Business Council and Business Forum, for identifying and launching multilateral economic cooperation projects in industrial sectors, as well as those of energy, transport and logistics, information and communication technologies, prioritised by the Russian side and its partners;

- to step up investment cooperation activities, such as improving the investment climate and sharing best practices;

- to further advance agricultural cooperation;

- to actively promote cooperation in science and technology within the BRICS framework;

- to develop, as a new avenue of cooperation, interaction between BRICS countries and private companies in using raw mineral resources, including their extraction and processing. To this end, a meeting of ministers of natural resources has been scheduled;

- to hold a meeting of environment ministers against the backdrop of the growing importance of environmental issues in all BRICS countries;

- to mobilise BRICS partners to take coordinated actions aimed at removing barriers to the development of mutual trade and economic ties (simplifying visa regime for entrepreneurs as much as possible, harmonising national technical standards of BRICS countries in certain sectors of the economy on the basis of international standards, addressing problems related to obtaining insurance and loans for exports to BRICS countries);

- to continue active cooperation on competition policy and taxes within the framework of BRICS, as well as between statistical agencies;

- to promote cooperation in combating corruption.

5. Boosting cooperation on migration and social and labour relations

Cooperation in this area is becoming ever more relevant due to the increased scale and complexity of social problems which the BRICS countries face today.

The objectives of Russia's Presidency in this area are as follows:

- to create an entirely new area of cooperation within BRICS related to migration and hold the first meeting of the heads of migration services of BRICS countries;

- to make cooperation more efficient in the social and labour sphere, including on the basis of the St.Petersburg G20 Summit decisions. To this end, it is proposed to establish within the framework of BRICS a working group on social and labour issues with the participation of international experts.

6. Cooperation in the field of healthcare as a means of strengthening Russia's positions in BRICS

Given the growing influence of BRICS in the international community on matters of addressing global health problems, there is a growing need to further strengthen the role which Russia plays in BRICS activities in this field.

As part of Russia's Presidency, partners will be encouraged to take more systematic and concerted action on the following tracks:

- non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular diseases;
- infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, hepatitis, malaria and dengue fever;
- healthcare systems;
- biomedical science;
- developing the most efficient mechanisms for assessing the quality and accessibility of healthcare;
- effectively promoting cooperation in the development, production and sale of means of preventing, diagnosing and treating infectious diseases (HIV/AIDS and other dangerous infections), including joint analysis of legal, economic and institutional aspects of the expansion of such cooperation;
- sharing information on achievements in the field of advanced medical technologies.

These efforts made jointly with BRICS partners under Russia's Presidency could result in the development of a set of practical arrangements BRICS' Contribution to Improving Global Health Security to be included in the final communique of the Summit.

7. Establishing full-scale social, political, and cultural cooperation in BRICS

Up until now, cooperation in these fields has been rather limited in BRICS. Russia's Presidency could achieve qualitative changes in the current situation in this important area, which will contribute to strengthening of the role of Russia in BRICS, developing dialogue between civilisations, and promoting the shared values of the BRICS countries on the global arena. Importantly, cooperation in this field can be used to enhance the status of Russian culture and language in the world's major countries, such as BRICS. Moreover, engaging the political forces and civil society organisations of the BRICS countries in the group's activities will broaden the internal support for this intergovernmental association.

The objectives stated above call for the following measures:

Social and political cooperation:

- to provide, through federal executive bodies, active assistance to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in promoting the establishment of a Parliamentary Forum of the BRICS countries;
- to provide assistance to Russian NGOs in organising and holding the BRICS Civil Society Forum;
- to provide assistance to the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) in organising and holding the BRICS Trade Union Forum.

Youth policy:

The time is ripe for the establishment of a youth dimension in BRICS through the implementation of a targeted programme of action, which should include:

- organising a BRICS Young Leaders Forum and a BRICS Global University Summit;
- establishing the BRICS Network University;
- increasing the admission of citizens of BRICS countries to Russian higher education institutions;
- organising a Forum of Young Diplomats from the BRICS countries, launching internship programmes for young diplomats from the BRICS countries in the Russian Foreign Ministry and admitting them at Russian higher education institutions on the basis of reciprocity, particularly the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Foreign Ministry under the Agreement on Cooperation among the Diplomatic Academies of the BRICS countries.

Culture:

The creation of a cultural dimension of BRICS should be initiated. Specifically, the following measures are proposed:

- organising meetings of ministers of culture of the BRICS countries;
- actively encouraging the elaboration of an intergovernmental agreement among the BRICS countries on cooperation in culture;
- expanding cultural exchanges among the BRICS countries with a focus on the promotion of Russian culture as a priority measure;
- facilitating enhanced cooperation among specialised agencies and tour operators of the BRICS countries. Attracting tourists from other BRICS countries to Russia is a priority task.

8. Awareness-raising during Russia's Presidency

During Russia's BRICS Presidency, there will be a focus on measures to significantly raise awareness of the activities of this institution in the BRICS countries and the international community.

For these purposes the following actions are planned:

- to set up a Public Diplomacy Forum with the participation of the heads of press-services of ministries of foreign affairs of the BRICS member countries and leading media outlets in order to share best practices on covering the activity of BRICS and possibly elaborate common approaches;
- to hold, together with the BRICS partners, a number of publicity campaigns devoted to the 70th anniversary of the victory in WWII. In political terms, the events are aimed at promoting the ideas of friendship and mutual understanding among the peoples of the BRICS countries; stiff resistance to attempts to revive the ideology and policies of Nazism, racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia in all their manifestations; and preventing the falsification of history, which seeks to undermine the foundations of the post-war world order;

- to launch the work of the BRICS Virtual Secretariat - a joint Internet site of the foreign services of member countries, which will contain information on the activities, history, objectives and operating principles of BRICS. The Virtual Secretariat is intended to become a common information platform for developing cooperation among the BRICS countries in the socio-political, economic, scientific, cultural, and youth spheres;
- to provide government support for the production of documentary TV films and TV and radio programmes devoted to BRICS; to prepare a special issue of the journal *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn* (International Affairs) devoted to Russia's BRICS Presidency;
- to hold a competition among BRICS journalists for the best report on the association.

9. Ensuring a qualitatively new level of external relations for BRICS

Given the quality of cooperation that has been achieved in BRICS on a wide range of problems and its growing prestige in the international arena, the agenda should include elevating the association's external relations to a level commensurate with its increased capacities.

To achieve this goal, it is recommended:

- to hold, on the margins of BRICS leaders summits and ministerial meetings, regular outreach events with the participation of the heads of major emerging economies, as well as international and regional organisations. Under Russia's Presidency, there are plans to hold such an event on the margins of the BRICS Summit in Ufa with the participation of Eurasian regional organisations;
- to begin a system of regular consultations of the BRICS Presidency with the heads of leading international and regional organisations - the UN, the EAEU, the African Union, the League of Arab States, the Islamic Cooperation Organisation, Latin American regional integration associations, ASEAN, etc.;
- to establish the practice of sending messages from the BRICS Presidency to the heads of leading international organisations on the most pressing issues of the world's political, financial and economic agenda.

The implementation of this Concept will strengthen Russia's positions in one of the most promising association of states, which increasingly shapes the trajectory of the world's politics and economy. The Concept will promote our country's foreign policy interests and economic development, and boost its media and cultural influence in the world. It will help create the preconditions for taking BRICS to new frontiers in the international arena.



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