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The EU and the BRICS soft power in Africa

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## Abstract

In the emerging multilateral global governance system, the dynamics of international relations evolved and prominent international state-actors opt for establishing formal alliances in order to pursue own interests in a more effective manner. The most distinguished international conjunction is presented by the European Union, highly interdependent supranational union created in the tradition of regionalism, which includes 27 European states and declares the principles of peace and freedom as its cornerstone. Another notable alliance is a relatively new high ambitions coalition called BRICS which comprises five emerging world economies and marks the realization of long-standing aspirations of non-Western representatives to obtain more inclusive multipolar global order. Directing at the same territories of influence, for instance, the Global South, the two grouping of states present different sets of values and pursue dissimilar goals, consequently attempting to actualize their distinct visions about how the international system shall look like in the future. Among a number of ways of exerting influence on developing regions, the EU and BRICS seem to mostly diverge in terms of soft power. Being one of the most ambitious evolving regions, Africa shares rich colonial common past with Europe, currently has an official representation in the face of South Africa within BRICS and is targeted for closer interconnectedness by both alliances. This paper, firstly, examines the formation and mechanism of the EU foreign policy and external action and the establishment of the BRICS grouping, alongside with the agenda of its external affairs. Then the paper shortly looks at the bilateral relationship of the two actors and assesses their strong suits and relative weaknesses. Subsequently, it explores the soft power of each of the EU and the BRICS elaborated and externally promotes. Finally, the paper studies the exercise of soft power of the EU and the BRICS in the African continent which is a case study and seeks to answer the question whether the BRICS, a relatively new effective international actor, is able to overcome the EU, a traditional African partner, in terms of exerting soft power in the African content. The paper concludes that while the BRICS as a grouping itself is not able to overcome the EU in exerting soft power influence in the African context, the consolidated powers, such as the EU, are increasingly threatened by a strong demand of developing states which largely coincides with the proclaimed objectives and the articulated agenda of the BRICS, and its demands of the need to reform the global governance inevitably transform the global politics.

## Introduction

The EU and the BRICS, two largely diverse international actors, express different political agenda and vision of world governance, as well as the rhetoric and exercise of soft power in developing regions of the world, such as Africa, which inevitably places them in competing positions. The European Union, a supranational entity composed of 27 Member States, is the most successful case of profound regional integration and is one of the most powerful global actors. The point of departure for the economic and political union which eventually became the European Union was the Second World War, or rather its disastrous consequences, and comprehension by the European leaders that there is a need of a guarantee of peaceful relations on the continent based on shared values and principles. In the current century, the EU was increasingly characterized as an influential soft power, due to the core values embedded in its identity and political culture and a lack of military resources. Despite the fact that the basis for closer integration among the European nations was purely economic, over the years the union successfully transformed into a fully political union with its own political identity. The EU fundamental values ingrained in its political identity and determining its external interactions with the third states are to be observed, *inter alia*, in the *Declaration on European Identity* (1973), in one of the first formal development partnerships, the *Yaoundé Convention* (1963) concluded with the former African colonies, the so-called *Copenhagen Criteria* was determined for the eligibility of the potential members, the *Petersberg Declaration* (1992), and in the Treaty on European Union (TEU) (1992). These encompassed such values and principles as democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights, social justice, and protection of minorities provided the principles of representative democracy, embedded in its political identity and implementation of its foreign policy. These values largely coincide with the political ideology of the global order, established after the end of the Second World War with the Bretton Woods Agreement of 1944, whose constructors were the Western powers, predominantly the United States, but also the European nations. The new effective actor, the BRICS grouping, made of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, who are all emerging powers, in contrast, expresses the directly contrary vision of the way the global governance should operate, countering the Liberal International Order. An impact of globalization, the declared *War on Terror* by the US and the Bush Doctrine, the status quo of the IFOs and other conditions of international governance deemed unjust by the emerging powers led to the establishment of the grouping. Demonstrating the common agenda among developing states during the Doha round agreement at the *World Trade Organization* (WTO), the 2008 international economic crisis served as a trigger for the beginning of the formal BRICS' existence, having highlighted the prominence of rising states and the impact of their economies in the international financial system. The BRICS have a club-like mechanism having annual summits and the

consequential declarations and action plans at the core of its institutionalization through which the member-states tackle a variety of issues, including energy, science and technology, labor, social policy, international security, and so on. The grouping promotes the principles of non-interference into domestic affairs, inviolability of state sovereignty and territorial integrity, 'South-South' Cooperation, multipolarity, and rule-based order against, as it claims, the Western hegemony and its unilaterally established world order which excludes the legitimate and merited position of many rising powers who the non-formal organization aspires to represent. The inclusion of South Africa as a formal member of the grouping and the establishment of the *New Development Bank* (NDB) gave a grouping a truly global personality and marked the BRICS' serious intentions towards the realization of its demands. The relationship between the EU and the BRICS is not consolidated and does not have a clearly defined cooperative and antagonistic character given the non-formality and recency of the BRICS. Among foreign policy strategies, the relatively new component, soft power, is acknowledged as increasingly effective, as opposed to the traditional, mostly realist, understanding of the efficient external influence. Largely formulated by the American scholar Joseph Nye which identified soft power as a power of attraction, therefore, contrary to the claims of the effectiveness of military resources and coercion, he stated that a state would be more successful having an attractive political culture and ideology, thus, others follow its agenda and policies perceiving them as just and legitimate. As opposed to the 'hard' power being strong in military might, the 'soft' power has highly attractive culture, political ideas and policies. Nye predominantly built its theory on the case of the US hegemony, discussing its success and preservation, which led to conceptual shortcomings, that is, it threatens to result in the excessive generalization. It is crucial, therefore, to go beyond Nye's theorization and examine each particular case, for instance, Ding's account on Chinese legacy of soft power. The EU soft power stems from what it symbolizes, its political identity, and characteristic of being normative and civilian power, and core values, in particular, as Manners identified, sustainable peace, freedom, democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, equality, social solidarity, sustainable development, and good governance. The success of the EU as a normative civilian power was demonstrated with the large Eastern European enlargement after the Fall of Berlin Wall in 1989. The exercise of soft power by the EU can be demonstrated through the partnership and association agreements it establishes with the conditionalities in form of clauses on democracy and respect of human rights, such as the *European Neighborhood Policy* (ENP) for instance, then the efforts to abolish of death penalty worldwide, regulation of global markets, and recent developments towards pro-EU politics in Ukraine. The BRICS states produce a set of soft power assets with values which attract non-Western developing states of the so-called Global South claiming to be underrepresented in international politics and to deserve greater inclusion they merit.

The BRICS states, having its own soft power expression, together externally promote the narrative of the urgent reform of the world governance towards equitable multilateralism and greater democratization of international relations, respecting the aforementioned principles, accusing the Western powers of imposing their agenda and universalizing their own experience, conducting illegitimate military interventions in the name of high morale, and incoherency with their own proclaimed values. The BRICS' articulated rhetoric supported by their political conduct in the international organizations, for instance two veto members of the UN Security Council, Russia and China, opposed the vote on Syria in the name of protection of its right of sovereignty, and by establishment of their IFO, the NDB, and creation of enlarged formal dialogues, such as the BRICS Outreach/BRICS+ formats. This is examined in detail in the first two chapters of the paper. Both actors attempt to exert influence on developing regions, such as the African continent, through the exercise of their soft power. Africa is a diverse continent of 54 states with rich natural resources which has the highest number of least underdeveloped countries which is mostly due to the long-lasting colonial legacy by the European powers. It is a rising actor in international relations with a strong desire to gain greater independent agency in world politics. The African nations succeeded at gaining more recognition in global politics thanks to closer regional integration in a form of the *African Union* (AU), the biggest and most significant intergovernmental organization in Africa, striving for the Pan-African approach and 'African solutions for Africans problems'. The institutionalization of the EU-Africa relations started with the series of formal agreements, such as *Yaoundé Convention*, *Lomé Convention*, *Cotonou Agreement*, within the framework of development cooperation. The current most extensive and comprehensive institutional relationship between the EU and the African states through which the EU is able to effectively exercise its soft power is the *Joint Africa-EU Strategy* (JAES). As stated in the action plans, the formal partnership supports the African aspirations for greater autonomy in international dialogue and seeks to address the African counterparts as an active participant, rather than a passive recipient of financial aid. The objectives proclaimed in the JAES action plans presuppose the values of democratic governance, human rights, social solidarity, and human dignity promoted by the EU. The established African political institutions, including the *African Governance Architecture* (AGA), the *Pan-African Parliament*, the *African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights*, the *Economic, Social and Cultural Council*, the *African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights*, the *African Peer Review Mechanism* (APRM) that are run mainly by the AU Commission all embrace the abovementioned values which largely reflect the EU political identity. The comprehensive dialogue on democratic governance and human rights and basic freedoms is further deepened by the *Africa-EU Platform for Dialogue* through which, for instance, the African specialists were able to have an opportunity to be trained in the *EU Election*

*Monitoring Missions* and monitor elections in the European Parliament. In addition, the EU directly engages the African citizens in promoting its soft power through the *Union for the Mediterranean* (UfM), a branch of the ENP, through such projects as the *WOMED* and the *EDILE*, via which the EU provides educational programs and investment to local business companies. Generally, the EU enjoys a wide influence and a large set of powerful tools to successfully back up its soft power, for instance, it is one of the largest donors of the development aid to the continent. The BRICS, in its turn, having a broad tangible resources basis for an effective use of soft power, engages with the African states predominantly on the basis of the ‘South-South’ Cooperation, according to which cooperation is granted among the developing states within the Global South, rather than unilaterally from the stronger states of the Global North. The BRICS states focus on the African underdeveloped infrastructure and provide large financial assistance to this matter, specifically, the grouping’s NDB provided the \$100 million loan to the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) within the framework of the *Sustainable Infrastructure Project*. The formal membership of South Africa also provides a great deal of soft power influence due to the symbolization it provides in terms of the due recognition of the African nations’ international actorness and the regional agenda South Africa advances through the summits it hosts. The Afrobarometer data demonstrated that the Africans held positive view of China’s aid and influence in the continent. This is explored in details in the third chapter of the paper. Through reviewing the foreign policy agenda of the EU and the BRICS, the rhetoric and exercise of their soft power globally and in Africa, as a case study, specifically, the paper asks whether the BRICS is able to overcome the EU in terms of exerting soft power in the African content and concludes that while the BRICS grouping itself is not able to overcome the EU, the soft power rhetoric of the EU is increasingly under threat by the narrative of the emerging powers, articulated by the BRICS, which sparks solidarity between the rising states and inevitably pushes their strong demand of reformation of the ‘unilaterally imposed’ world governance to the practical realization.

## 1. The European Union and the BRICS as global actors

### 1.1 The European Union foreign policy

#### 1.1.1 The point of departure of the establishment of the EU

Since 1648 Peace of Westphalia that defined the contemporary world order, the state is deemed as a central unit within international relations. Recent transformations towards closer cooperation and the rise of globalization and consequently inevitable increased interconnectedness led to the restructure of this classic international system and incentivized states to build various kinds of alliances and partnerships. One of the most prominent direct results was the creation of the European Union which metamorphosed the central European continent from frequent interstate rivalry and war conflict to the first effective 'security community' with its self-portrayal as a 'borderless area of freedom, security and justice' (Vaughan-Williams 2009). The European Union serves as the most prominent example of the profound regional integration based on geographical, economic, political and value-oriented proximity. The point of departure for the establishment of what ended up being the European Union was the Second World War and consequent understanding of the urgent need to ensure peaceful relations between states based on fundamental values of democracy and security. In 1948, three years after the end of the Second World War, France, the United Kingdom and the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) signed the *Treaty of Brussels*, the founding treaty for the military alliance between these states called the *Western Union* (WU). The WU marked the first official progress towards autonomous collective European action in the sphere of defense. At the time there were vigorous negotiations by the victorious states regarding German disarmament and consequent control over it through an intergovernmental alliance. In particular, the United States proposed an arrangement with a direct American control of the German army that would afterwards become the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The French government rejected this proposal, and the plan of a joint European army was proposed by R. Pleven through his project, *the European Defense Community* (EDC), where a collective army under a supranational authority and a common budget was proposed. In 1952 the EDC was signed by the six 'inner' states of European integration, the Benelux countries, France, Italy, and West Germany. Constructed according to Jean Monnet's idea, this defense community prioritized the supranational component, thereby deviating from the initial Pleven Plan (Bindi 2012). However, the French National Assembly decisively rejected the project, and the European common defense has been developing primarily within the framework of NATO since then. The common European initiative instead turned to the economic partnership, and the *European Coal and Steel Community* (ECSC), inspired by the ideational fathers and architects of the European integration project Jean Monnet and



Robert Schuman with the Schuman plan (1950) and enacted by the Treaty of Paris, became the first successful big step towards profound cooperation between leading European states, especially France and Germany. The liberal idea that tight economic interdependence makes war costlier and increases the probability of peace in international relations was at the core of the European Union project. As for the further evolution of the European defense policy, the next attempt was made through the Western European Union (WEU), defense and military alliance, which characterized the incentive of Europe to act as a fully autonomous and independent international actor and boost the integration in the security and defense domain. In the light of the previous failure, the formal alliance was based on the modified Brussels Treaty (MBT) and admitted West Germany and Italy.

### 1.1.2 The establishment of the *European Economic Community* and the *European Political Community*

In 1958 the ECSC was transformed in the *European Economic Community* (EEC), introduced with the Treaty of Rome, that deepened intraunion trade and economic ties and within foreign competence, according to the article 131 (ex Article 110),

“By establishing a customs union between themselves Member States aim to contribute, in the common interest, to the harmonious development of world trade, the progressive abolition of restrictions on international trade and the lowering of customs barriers” (Treaty of Rome 1957).

The commercial policy was determined to be led by the Commission. The new treaty had also dealt with the succession to the EEC and association agreements with non-European countries. The Article 182 (ex Article 131) stated that:

“The purpose of association shall be to promote the economic and social development of the countries and territories and to establish close economic relations between them and the Community as a whole” (Treaty of Rome 1957).

In the 1960s the European community continued its tendency towards development policy, and one of the first concrete advancements was the Yaoundé Convention (1963), the beginning of European partnership with Africa, signed between the Six, six states of the EEC and the Eighteen, and the Eighteen, 18 newly independent African states, including 14 former French dependencies, three Belgian ones, and one former Italian trust territory. As stated in the article 182, the agreement primarily targeted economic cooperation in order to assist with social well-being and prosperity of the African states in accordance with the system formulated in the Treaty of Rome which envisages the process of economic aid to the third countries through the European Development Fund (EDF). Another important part of the EEC treaty was the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) for promotion of international trade by means of lowering general trade barriers. As a part of this

agreement, the Six negotiated significant trade arrangements with various countries, such as Greece, Turkey, Israel, Lebanon, and the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency countries (Bindi 2012). Thus, the initial experience of the European states in foreign policy was embedded in the economic aid and commercial treaties towards third countries of various economic background and level of advancement. Seeking for more profound intra political unification, the French government under George Pompidou's presidency launched the initiative during the Hague Summit (1969). The final communiqué of the summit stated that with the finalization of the Common Market within the community, "the united Europe" will be "capable of assuming its responsibilities in the world of tomorrow and of making a contribution commensurate with its traditions and its mission" (Final communiqué of the Hague Summit, point 3). The members of the EEC made further progress in the field of foreign policy matters with the Davignon Report (1970) which established the European Political Cooperation (EPC) setting up the principle of regular meetings between the national foreign ministers with the consultation of the European Commission when required. The follow-up of this was the Copenhagen Report (1973) that strengthened the intergovernmental consultation mechanism on international affairs and reinforced the work of working groups which began to work initially on the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and Asia (Bindi 2012). Following the shift from the Six to the "Europe of the Nine" after the accession of the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Denmark, the European community formally institutionalized the domain of foreign policy in the form of the European Council composed of the heads of the Member States and their foreign ministers alongside with the participation of the president of the European Commission. Throughout the 1960s-1970s the European Council saw many crisis-ridden external circumstances, such as the Vietnam War, the oil crisis, the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, the Falklands war, and others, that required its joint response. In addition, the United States made attempts at reaffirming its global hegemony and aspirations in relation to the rise of the autonomy of Europe. The enlarged European Community responded with the Declaration on European Identity (1973) which aimed at defining better the external relationships of the community by setting forth the fundamental principles of its identity. The development of the collective identity within the European context can be best thought of within the framework of the constructivist theory of international relations, according to which the state interactions are socially constructed and depend on the mutual perceptions of states. The intersubjective meanings created as the result of the inter-state interactions serve for the formulation of identity and its rules and norms. Among the most crucial fundamental elements of the European identity were "the principles of representative democracy, the rule of law, social justice – which is the ultimate goal of economic progress – and respect for human rights" (Declaration on European Identity 1973). In particular, the declaration stated that the nine Member States would strive for

“in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, ensuring that international relations have a more just basis; that the independence and equality of States are better preserved; that prosperity is more equitably shared; and that the security of each country is more effectively guaranteed” (Declaration on European Identity 1973).

Furthermore, the official document specified that the position of the Nine towards each important international actor shortly describing each bilateral relation. Concerning the African content, the communiqué claimed that the Community would “implement its undertakings towards the Mediterranean and African countries in order to reinforce its long-standing links with these countries” (Declaration on European Identity, 1973). Over the next decade the EPC continued its tendency towards more substantial autonomy from the United States and showed its firm view on the international issues that was distinct from the one of the political hegemon, for instance, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Still, the collective response on foreign policy was slow due to the occasional internal division of opinions. After the Southern enlargement with the accession of Greece in 1974 and Spain and Portugal in 1986, the European Community marked the democratization in Southern Europe and bigger involvement in Latin America due to the colonial past of the new members. In consequence of a large number of problems of internal coordination and institutional arrangements, the twelve Member States undertook the first major reform of the foundational treaty of Rome, the Single European Act (SEA 1986). The revision codified, inter alia, the cornerstone of the European foreign policy, specifically, Title III regarded the European cooperation in the sphere of foreign policy (Bindi 2012). The treaty has manifoldly emphasized the need for the effective capacity of state officials for joint action to later implement common European positions. The European Council was formally stated as the principal organ in the field of foreign policy, while the European Commission was the main reference of assistance and the European Parliament had the right to be informed. The SEA formalized the main actors in foreign policy, namely, the Presidency, the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the national foreign minister holding the Presidency, and a member from the European Commission. Finally, expressing the demand for the intensification of cooperation with third states, the treaty stated what would become the Association Agreement of the European Union, particularly, agreements with third countries implying reciprocal rights and obligations, common actions and special procedures (Bindi 2012).

### 1.1.3. The Maastricht Treaty and the establishment of the European Union

In the aftermath of the fall of Berlin Wall, stronger Europe with the united Germany ratified the Maastricht treaty (1992) and the formally economic alliance was officially recognized as *the European Union* marking the final transition from a solely economic partnering to a fully political

one. At this stage, alongside with the important introduction of the monetary union, this foundational treaty had also marked arising supranational sovereign powers of the principal European Union institutions over its Member States, the emergence of European Union citizenship and a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union which was placed in Title V of the second pillar under the umbrella of the new three-pillar system. The new division scheme defined two intergovernmental entities, such as CFSP and the Justice and Home Affairs, and a supranational one, the European Council. The treaty has stated again the significance for the Member States to act in cohesion with each other and the supranational entity in a “spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity” representing the common interests and objectives of the Union. The formal procedure envisaged the Presidency as the principal representative of CFSP within the EU with the European Council deciding on the general guidelines, whereas, representatives of diplomatic missions and European Commission were supposed to cooperate and the European Parliament to be consulted. As for the financial matter, title V did not presume an inter-member state budget for the CFSP in the spirit of intergovernmentalism. The WEU was settled to be in close cooperation with the CFSP acting as a bridge with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the primary actor in peace and security. Moreover, the WEU approved the Petersberg Declaration stating that the European military force is available to run missions for the sake of peacekeeping and humanitarian aid. The subsequent Lisbon report delineated the geographical areas of particular interest of the EU, including Africa within the North-South dimension (Bindi 2012). Among the initial actions the delegation from the European Union, in the name of promotion of the rule of law and democracy, was one of the observers during the South African general elections of 1994. As a consequence of the severe crisis following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the European Union has restated that peacebuilding and humanitarian support were the tenet of its concept of security following the logic of the Petersberg Declaration. In the light of the future likely accession of several Eastern European countries, the European Council determined the so-called Copenhagen criteria (1993) for the eligibility of the potential members to the union, in particular, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and protection of minorities provided by stable institutions, a functioning market economy, and capacity to implement the rules that make up the EU law. As much as 16 countries have joined the European Union since the introduction of these criteria, a large number of them coming from unstable background of emerging democracies, which shows that successful transformation of states into the system similar to the one established by the founding EU treaties had been a significant foreign policy of the union. In 1995, as part of the transatlantic cooperation between the USA and the EU, the general framework of global objectives was specified: promotion of peace, democracy and development and contribution to the expansion of world trade and closer external economic relations which constitutes one of the most

powerful foreign tools of the European Union, international trade. The same year the European Council decided that all agreements signed by this EU institution must contain respect for human rights and democratic principles (Bindi 2012). An extra momentum was once again dedicated to the autonomous European defense during the Saint-Malo negotiations between France and UK leading to the transformation of this area into the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). The CFSP has been progressively reinforced with the subsequent treaties, such as the Amsterdam Treaty (1997), the Treaty of Nice (2001), and the Lisbon Treaty (2009).

#### 1.1.4. The Lisbon Treaty

The latter treaty commemorated the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and renamed the Treaty that established the European Community into the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Both CFSP and ESDP were located in the TEU within the general provisions of the Union's external action (Title V TEU), whereas the EU external relations policies, such as trade, development, cooperation with third countries, humanitarian aid, and relations with international organizations in the TFEU. Overall, the main objective of the Lisbon Treaty was to bolster the complex Union external act by improving coherence and effectiveness between the institutional actors (Blockmans and Laatsit 2012). Firstly, it introduced the international legal personality of the EU, namely, the union enlarged its scope of competence to signing international treaties, and, secondly, the post of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy who fused with a Commission Vice-President. The High Representative has also become a chief coordinator and a representative of the CFSP and the Community's external policy instruments, such as development budgets and aid (Wright 2011). The European Council was assigned a leading institutional role identifying the strategic interests and objectives of the EU. The Council of the European Union, made of national ministers, was made the main decision-making organ in the area. Its assignment is to frame the CFSP and take the decisions to implement it on the basis of the general guidelines of the European Council. One of the thematical configurations of this institution is the Foreign Affairs Council composed of the national foreign ministers and chaired by the HR. The European Parliament was entrusted a somewhat limited role having the right of consultation by the HR. Seemingly, neither the European Commission obtained major role in the foreign policy since it didn't have any direct involvement in shaping CFSP. However, the Commission is responsible for the implementation of the Union budget and is a prominent player in significant policy areas, such as development cooperation (Koutrakos 2017). As for the EU policies that have clear external dimension, the principal ones are CFSP, the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), Common Commercial Policy (CCP), development

cooperation, humanitarian aid, enlargement, and the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). Some internal Union policies also have an external aspect, namely, the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, agriculture, public health, environment, energy, and tourism. The Lisbon Treaty has also proclaimed its paramount development goal which is the eradication of poverty. The general coordination and realization of the Union's external action is provided for by the so-called external assistance instruments which are the Development and Cooperation Initiative (DCI), European Development Fund (EDF), the new European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI), the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and others (Blockmans and Laatsit 2012). Furthermore, another rather important introduction established by the treaty was the European External Action Service (EEAS) made of Commission and Council officials and the diplomats seconded from the Member States to assist the High Representative in preparing acts to be adopted and to carry out the EU diplomatic service (Gatti 2016). It entails six geographical directorates, in particular, Africa, the Americas, Asia and Pacific, Europe, Eastern Europe & Central Asia, Middle East & North America. It also comprises a distinctive department called *Global Agenda and Multilateral Relations* which deals with four subject matters, that are multilateral relations and global governance, human rights and democracy, conflict prevention and security policy, and non-proliferation and disarmament (Blockmans and Laatsit 2012). The Lisbon Treaty made to enhance common decision-making and policy-implementation in the domain of external act was the last fundamental constitutional change in the Union legal order marking the distinctive status of the international actorship of the European Union. This "economic giant, political dwarf and military worm", as portrayed by C. R. Whitney is a supranational international organization in which 27 Member States largely retain their decision-making power in foreign policy, security, and defense depending on the concrete subject matter of the external interaction. In order for a political decision of the EU external action to be realized, it needs a consensus vote of all Member States (Freire 2017). The fact that the Member States retained their autonomy in the CFSP reflects the possible issue of the states to prioritize their national priorities rather than the shared European objectives. The sophisticated system of checks and balances of the European Union will demonstrate whether the supranational organization has the potential to sustain being a political giant which put down roots in many developing world regions.

## 1.2 The formation of the BRICS

### 1.2.1. The point of departure of the establishment of the BRICS

Throughout the last 30 years, prominently, after the end of the Cold War in 1991, it has become evident that the international power balance had altered towards greater multipolarity shifting the focus from the consolidated Western powers, such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, the dominant European States and others to rising powers from other angles of the globe, namely, the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, India, Brazil and even South Africa which form one of the most solidified and discernible groupings of non-Western major global actors, the so-called BRICS. Concluding its 7<sup>th</sup> annual summit hosted by Russia, the grouping evidenced its growing importance in the global governance in the Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership:

“BRICS is a dialogue and cooperation platform among Member States (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) which together account for 30% of global land, 43% of global population and 21% of the world’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 17.3% of global merchandise trade<sup>1</sup>, 12.7% of global commercial services<sup>2</sup> and 45% of world's Agriculture Production<sup>3</sup>. This platform aims to promote peace, security, prosperity and development in multipolar, interconnected and globalized world. The BRICS countries represent Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America, which gives their cooperation a transcontinental dimension making it especially valuable and significant” (BRICS 2015).



Image 1. VII 2015 BRICS Summit in Ufa, Russia (Source: The Brookings Institute)

The settled post-World War II world order was structured through several establishments in which the United States was a key player, alongside with Western European countries. The arisen settlements included the Bretton Woods Agreement (1944) which, most significantly, established its Bretton Woods Institutions: the *International Bank of Reconstruction and Development* (World Bank,

WB), the *International Monetary Fund* (IMF) and led to the further introduction of the *General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade* (GATT), the precursor of the *World Trade Organization* (WTO). In addition, the Western countries built up the United Nations (1945), the first and foremost step towards the institutionalization of global governance for the sake of international peace, then the Marshall Plan (1948), the American economic recovery for Europe, and, finally, the creation of NATO (1949), the security alliance with the primary aim of creating a pact of assistance against the expansionism of the USSR. As for more regional evolutions, the global conflict has instigated the consolidation of the first substantial ‘security community’, notably the formation of the *European Coal And Steel Community* (1951) which was progressively transformed into the presently known European Union. The principal international intra-state financial, economic, political and security institutions and alliances which to this day shape the global politics were thus a ‘product’ of the specific period of time in the aftermath of the disastrous war and was mainly led by the victorious Western powers. This represents a somewhat unipolar world order originated from the Western values, vision, modus operandi of the developed democratic states that can appear as hegemonic. Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century which marked the new era of globalization, it became clear that a number of rising powers experienced a great degree of economic growth and that such expansion combined with large political ambitions inevitably leads to the restructuration of the management of the global affairs, for instance in relation to the representation in the international organizations and the exertion of influence on the various world regions. This led to the new debates among the IR academics regarding the threat of the Liberal International Order (LIO) established after the World War II by the Western powers, such as the US and the EU, by the rising powers, such as China, India, Brazil, and so on. Some scholars argued that the LIO was “a multifaceted and sprawling international order, organized around economic openness, multilateral institutions, security cooperation and democratic solidarity” (Ikenberry 2018, p. 7). In the modern era, this world order, according to the IR scholars, such as J. Mearsheimer, is being challenged being interpreted as multipolar since emerging powers dispute the established global system (Mearsheimer 2019). In 2001, two months after September 11, the investment bank Goldman Sachs, through Jim O’Neill’s publication named “Building Better Global Economic BRICs”, put forward the acronym BRIC after four growing economies, Brazil, Russia, India, and China, and highlighted the importance of taking into consideration the new players whose economies were claimed to measure up with those of the G7 countries in 11 years (Haibin 2012).





Image 2. The BRICS and the G7 on a world map.

Alongside with an impact of globalization, this grouping was also somewhat a byproduct of the *War On Terror* launched by the United States starting with the war in Iraq. Demonstrating its superpower and major authority it holds over the rest of the world, the USA challenged the political sovereignty of Iraq exerting the principle of preemption. The Bush Doctrine was a wary sign for the whole developing world including the BRICS countries that had a strong aspiration to claim an influence on the same level as these major powers do (Laidi 2011). Prior to the final formation of the BRICS in 2009, there were attempts of formal unifications among the emerging actors, for instance the tripartite grouping, the *IBSA Dialogue Forum* (2003) between India, Brazil, and South Africa, which, inter alia, called for the reformation of the United Nations Security Council while declaring themselves multiethnic, multicultural and democratic emerging states. While this alliance provided one of the symbolic signs of the changing international system, it lacked political significance and recognition. However, the newfound capacity of political manifestation of emerging states soon appeared during the Doha round agreement at the World Trade Organization (WTO) Summit in Cancún in 2003 where three BRIC, e.g. India, China, and Brazil, assisted by other developing countries announced their principles in relation to multilateral agreements on trade, hence challenging the traditional stakeholders, despite the fact that there was the divergence of interest between the future BRICS members. Another institution where the BRICS share membership, in this case all five of them, is G20, an intergovernmental forum on governance of global economy, which was introduced to broaden the more elitist G7 in order to address the global economic dimension more effectively. The BRICS countries, arguably, have not gained a sense of being the full-fledged participants and did not host summits in the beginning, moreover, since there were several other developing economies, such

as Turkey, Mexico, Indonesia and the rest, the BRICS states failed to consider themselves as the exclusive incomers (Cooper 2016). An additional source of newfound shared symbolism appeared within the *Outreach Five* (O5), an official interaction between the G7 and expanding economies, in particular, Brazil, China, India, Mexico, and South Africa. The closest interaction took place at the Gleneagles Summit of 2005, being an “outreach dialogue”, between at the time the G8 that included the Russian Federation and the O5. The host of the summit, the UK, invited all five members in order to demonstrate the gradual inclusivity of the formal dialogues by representing the developing world. Once again, all the members of the forthcoming BRICS were invited to the formal summits on global governance by the major Western powers which, however, produced the sense of second-class status and continued exclusion, except for Russia which was nevertheless excluded from the G8 following the annexation of Crimea. These engagements via various chief multilateral summit processes and international institutions therefore gave more minor but nonetheless rising states a sense of cohesion and unity by contradistinguishing themselves with big powers. But more importantly, it was the financial crisis of 2008 that ultimately served as a trigger for the emergence of the formal grouping with a distinctive institutional personality named BRICs (Cooper 2016). The international economic crisis showed both the vulnerability of the first economic power of the world, the United States, and of the global economic structure reliant on it and the relevance of the rising economies without which the recession would have been deeper and on which henceforth global growth would also depend (Laidi 2011). The present BRICS, thus, constitutes a non-formal international organization of emerging powers aspiring to change the fundamental dynamics of the global order and whose primary domain of cooperation, economic one, had the effect of spillover spreading to other areas.

### 1.2.2. The structure and mechanism behind the BRICS

In 2009, Russia took the initiative of holding the first official summit which was conducted in Ekaterinburg. In the joint statement of the BRIC countries’ leaders, they emphasized the significance of the democratization of the international system:

“We underline support for a more democratic and just multipolar world order based on the rule of international law, equality, mutual respect, cooperation, coordinated action and collective decision-making of all states” (BRIC 2009).

Since then, the official grouping has instituted the annual summits held in rotation by each member and the subsequent issue of collective declarations as the core of their club-like institutional process. The summits are unquestionably the principal component of the institutionalization of the group which has an element of a ‘spectacle’ to it since it receives extensive media coverage and welcomes various types of guests, for instance non-state actors, such as think tanks (Cooper 2016). Being the

second largest economy worldwide, China is considered to be the most ambitious and promising among rising powers, therefore, the most potent member within the BRICS. According to the political scientist of the realist school of thought, John Mearsheimer, reflecting the Thucydides' trap, the rising power will inevitably challenge the incumbent one leading to a war. Independently of the long-lasting debate in relation to the military or peaceful resolution of the dilemma, China is argued to have the capacity and even to aim to become the primary challenger to the present incumbent power, the United States. As for the grouping, China is the principal trade partner of Brazil, India, and South Africa which also illustrates the growing interdependence between the members (Laïdi 2011). Furthermore, China enjoys the inclusion in the principal international institutions, most significantly, it is one of the five veto members within the UN Security Council. In general, China, the 'world's manufacturer', outperforms other members according to nearly any criteria related to GDP, trade, investment, or currency reserves, consequently appearing as the fulcrum of the BRICS (Cooper 2016).

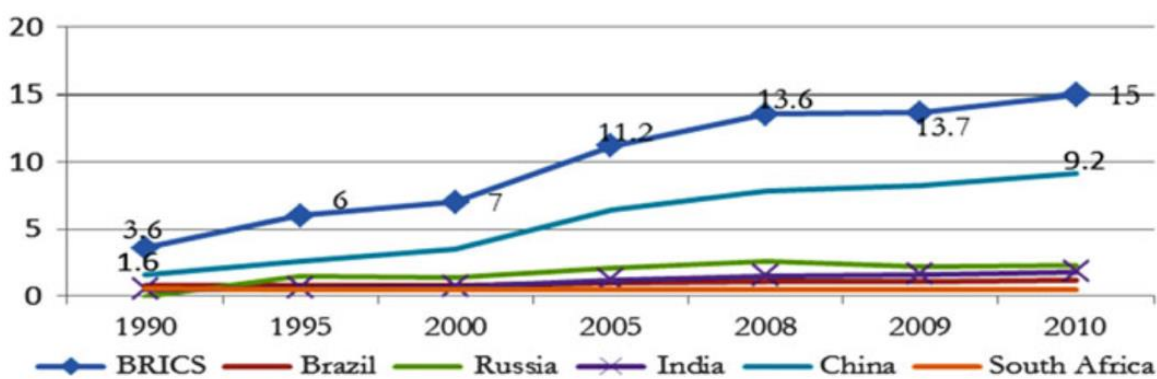


Figure 1. BRICS share of world trade (%) 1990-2010 (Source: The BRICS Report 2012, India: Oxford University Press 2012)

In 2017, the Xiamen Summit hosted by China illustrated the exclusive role played by the country in the grouping. The concomitant Xiamen Declaration pointed out the parallelity between the Chinese vision of the world and its foreign policy and the envisaged strategies for the BRICS (Menegazzi 2018). The atypical member within the alliance is the Russian Federation. It cannot be strictly identified as the rising power, as some argue that it is rather a declining state in the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR and, one of the two most powerful states in a bipolar world of the Cold War. On the one hand, Russia enjoys the privileges of the former great power, having the right of veto in the UNSC alongside with solely other four states in the world and until recently it was also included in the G8. Generally, Russia, like China, had the sufficient international recognition by the incumbents of the old establishment. On the other hand, geostrategically, following the fragmentation of the territory since 1991, Russia is gradually losing its previously enjoyed regional hegemony as the post-Soviet states strive for the closer cooperation with the European states, in particular, the

European Union and the values it represents. Moreover, the Russian economy's GDP is the second-to-last among the BRICS members, for instance its export profile is more restricted than the others, especially when compared to China (Cooper 2016). Russia depends mostly on the exportation of the energy resources, namely oils and gas, and the primary consumers are the European countries, such as Germany. However, recently the European consumers took dramatic steps in order to decrease their dependence on the Russian resources after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 which will lead to the further deterioration of the country's economic level and to the growing political isolation. It is also worth to note that Russia marks the last in relation to the annual population growth compared to the other BRICS states. India, alongside with Brazil, can be, in contrast to the first two members of the BRICS, considered to be the truly emerging powers within the grouping. India is among the fastest growing economies across the world, and just like the rest of the BRICS states, is a major player in its region. India is the second most populated country worldwide after China, and is forecasted to outrank it having one of the highest population growths. Together with Brazil, India endeavor for the reform of the UNSC aspiring to gain the permanent veto-wielding membership there. Being one of the core states of Latin America, Brazil's economic growth, although volatile, is among the biggest in the world. Some of the strongest suits of Brazil are the export growth in agriculture and natural resources and demographic position, in particular an adequate level of young population to sustain the future economic prosperity (Cooper 2016). The curious detail about these four BRICS countries is that they enjoy a somewhat 'dual status', being both insiders and outsiders of the international system. While enjoying membership and being actively involved in such institutions of global governance as G20 with the traditional consolidated Western powers, the BRICS countries maintain the links with the Global South through the establishment of their stand-alone grouping continuing to assert the proclaimed opposition to the traditional predominance of the West noticeable through the functioning of the international governance (Cooper 2016). This duality is seen to be beneficial for the five states since the open confrontation of the West and therefore exclusion from the essential processes within the international system will be harmful to, primarily, their economic interests. Instead, the group demonstrates versatility preferring multi-alignment rather than bloc-building (Brosig 2021). The fact that the BRICS choose the path of the moderate progressive reforms avoiding the disruption of the current world order, inter alia, through the consolidated international institutions can be followed up with via the claims of the significance of the collaboration with the G20 and the UN throughout the annual summit declarations (Menegazzi 2018).

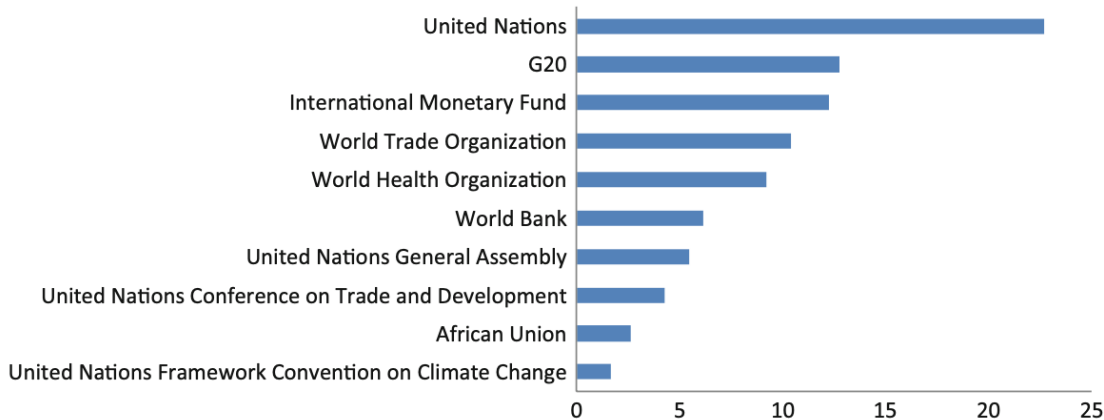


Figure 2. Top references to international institutions in BRICS documents, share of the total, 2008-2014, % (Source: Own elaboration).

One year after the first official summit, the BRIC club decided to expand and represent all the prospective continents of the world through its formal grouping. Backed by China, South Africa was accepted as a full member adding C to their acronym and officially becoming BRICS. Given the fact that South African economy is the smallest among the members, its accession rather signified increased BRICS foreign policy standing and realization of the long-standing aspiration regarding the formal representation of the international various stakeholders on the global scene (Brosig 2021). The Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov claimed that the membership of South Africa, the “leading African country”, has given the grouping “a truly global dimension”. Following the fall of apartheid regime in 1994, South Africa was considered to represent the whole of Africa by the West through the O5, whereas there was no general consent regarding this leadership within the continent. An acute problem for the country was thus equilibrate between an active participation with the G8 and attempts of increasing its legitimacy among other African states (Cooper 2016). The economic role of post-apartheid South Africa has been growing across the continent at a fast space becoming a significant foreign investor in Africa. Its progress can be pointed out for example through such undertaking as the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) where South Africa holds a dominant role (Alden and Soko 2005). In addition, it was the South African head of state, Thabo Mbeki, who effectively launched the African Union (AU) in 2002 also became the first chairperson of the most significant union between the African states. According to the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) company’s data, despite the fact that South Africa, as much as the whole region, experiences the decrease in the economic growth due to the latest global crises, such as the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the country still offers major market opportunities, specifically a roughly 60 million population, a sophisticated financial system, well-established manufacturing sector, a century-long legacy of commodity exports, and highly innovative companies. After the formal declaration of accession to the BRICS, South Africa physically attended the Sanya Summit of 2011 in China where

one of the identified urgent global issues was the need of reform of the international financial institutions (IFIs) (Cooper 2016). In particular, five members made this goal a priority in their joint ‘Sanya Action Plan’:

“We call for a quick achievement of targets for the reform of the International Monetary Fund agreed to at previous G20 Summits and reiterate that the governing structure of the international financial institutions should reflect the changes on the world economy, increasing the voice and representation of emerging economies and developing countries” (BRICS 2011).

South Africa was the only member of the BRICS that concentrated on a comprehensive regional agenda, cooperation and development in Africa, as one of the principal strategical actions of the grouping proclaiming it through the first summit it hosted. In 2013 South Africa held its first BRICS Summit in Durban, the overarching theme of which was under the title “BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Development, Integration and Industrialization”. In keeping with the spirit of openness of the BRICS summits, dozens of African states representatives were invited to the display of the extensive outreach program which also helped South Africa to promote its regional authority (Brosig 2021). The BRICS agenda on the African development was subsequently tackled during the Goa Summit of 2016 hosted by India where the Africa 2030 Agenda was laid down, and it was further deepened during the 2018 Johannesburg Summit named “BRICS in Africa: Collaboration for Inclusive Growth and Shared Prosperity in the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution” which advanced more profound collaboration in security and peacekeeping. As a matter of fact, in the official speech called “South Africa: A strong African Brick in BRICS”, Marius Fransman, the deputy minister of international relations and cooperation, stated:

“Drawing from the important history of the origins of South-South cooperation laid down in 1955 at the Bandung Conference, as well as with the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, the Government of South Africa recognised that we have to be part of the forward march of history. Our accession into BRICS is also an acknowledgement of the fact that the age of globalization requires us to elevate mutual partnerships to a different level” (Fransman 2012).

The so-called ‘South-South’ cooperation emerged in a clear form as early as in 1955 at the Bandung Conference of Asian and African states, some of them being India, Egypt, Ghana, Ethiopia, China, and Indonesia. The global South states invoked the informal methods of institutionalization, the summit meeting, reflecting the pattern of the emerging and developing states to act as independent international actors and symbolically declare themselves as such (Cooper 2016). It is argued that the BRICS grouping has the normative and conceptual roots in the Bandung conference and its principles (Brosig 2021). In the absence of the stipulated joint charter, the set of aims and values promoted by the BRICS can be conceptualized through the collective summit declarations which are the sort of soft codification (Brosig 2021). In fact, within the BRICS members China was the most vocal

regarding the ‘South-South’ collaboration explicitly proposing this framework in a number of initiatives, such as the BRICS+/BRICS Outreach approaches for much broader network of cooperation with the Global South rising states and individual Chinese undertakings, specifically, the *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank* (AIIB) ambitiously targeted at overturning the LIO (Menegazzi 2023). The normative framework briefly includes sovereign equality of all nations in world affairs, territorial integrity, the principle of non-intervention to the domestic affairs of other sovereign states, non-coercive diplomacy, and reform of the IFIs as was mentioned above. What undoubtedly united these states all together is the erosion of Western hegemonic claims (Läidi 2011). Another priority objective that was set in the agenda of the Durbin Summit was the determination to set up a multilateral development bank to promote international development of the evolving regions. In just one year, during the sixth Summit in Fortaleza, Brazil, five countries signed the Agreement of the New Development Bank (NDB) and made an initial contribution in order for the bank to be effective in financing the infrastructure which, from the BRICS perspective, is pivotal for the sustainable development. Within the general framework of the promotion of development in the Global South, the NDB principally engages in funding the infrastructure projects in developing countries which is a serious long-term investment in the future that will serve the BRICS’ non-economic purposes as well (Haibin 2012). The purposes and functions of the NDB include:

“[The mobilization] of resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries, complementing the existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global growth and development” (BRICS 2015).

The establishment of the NDB was a turning point of the institutionalization and one of the most substantial reforms practically achieved by the grouping through which five rising states seek to fulfil their pretension of underrepresentation and unipolarity of the key global economic institutions and to provide global public goods. Alongside with the creation of their own international institution of economic development, the BRICS also joined the larger *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank* (AIIB). One of the greatest advantages these banks hold over the Western financial institutions is freedom of the conditionalities, such as the functionality of democratic institutions and respect for human rights, imposed by the West and more control over the financing projects enjoyed by the borrowing countries (Haibin 2012).

### 1.2.3. The points of convergence of the BRICS

The BRICS counterpose themselves via the narratives of the democratization of international relations, multipolarity and post-colonial determinism with the Western neoliberal states in

connection to the economic global governance as well (Menegazzi 2018). Over the course of time the BRICS states put down roots in a number of other various areas which they deal with through their value-oriented lenses. In particular, outside the group the BRICS countries have a growing role in the domains such as climate change and sustainability as well. Their input could be traced in the UN climate change negotiations in Copenhagen (2009) and further in Paris (2015) and the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals which showed the leading position the BRICS states are taking in the global climate governance agenda. One of the outputs of the 2015 Ufa Summit in Russia, was the newly established Environment Working Group scrutinizing the opportunities of financing the environmental projects through the NDB (Fan 2021). The summit declaration provided for another spillover element, cooperation in international education, in the form of the BRICS Network University which envisaged the exchange programs between the students of the BRICS countries (Menegazzi 2018). Since the outset of the Ekaterinburg Summit, the BRICS held 14 summit meetings alternately tackling a variety of international issues: energy, science and technology, labor, social policy, counter-terrorism, international security and so on. On the longer scale the BRICS grouping plans to extend within the developing region introducing the so-called BRICS-plus world inclusive of the N11 and MIST (Cooper 2016).

#### 1.2.4. The points of divergence of the BRICS

Having listed the points of convergence of the BRICS, it is also important to note that the BRICS grouping is perceived by many as rather a heterogeneous bloc composed of states with different and often competing interests which utilize the coalition as a means to pursue their own interests. A significant number of scholars remarked that for China, arguably the most strategic member of the grouping, the BRICS is a means to carry out its foreign policy on behalf of the Belt and Road Initiative which has ambitious plans of global infrastructure development making the alliance a piece of the puzzle of a large image. The resulting state-centric interests and incoherence limit the effective decision-making and collective action and puts the group in a great disadvantage especially compared to the sophisticated and highly institutionalized alliances such as the European Union. First of all, in contrast with the consolidated international organizations such as the G7 in which the members all share the same political system, China, Russia, India, Brazil, and South Africa lack the same like-mindedness that can impede the deepening of linkage between the states. Secondly, the practical reality evidences the divergence of interests of the five states in relation to the question of reforming the UNSC. On paper, the BRICS grouping claims that there is a need of the restructuration of the Security Council which does not keep pace with the current state of global affairs in which emerging



powers play a major part. India and Brazil have both the long-lasting ambition to gain the UNSC membership. In practice, the two members of the BRICS that possess the membership and the correspondent veto power, Russia and China, are quite hesitant about the enlargement of the council opposing the increase of the number of members. Thirdly, India and China have territorial disputes over the territory of Kashmir, a rather sensible issue for India which confronts the Chinese expansionism in the Southeast Asia. And finally, there is a certain discrepancy between the values and goals, such as the world order based on international law, respect of state sovereignty, the principles of non-intervention, codified in the BRICS summit declarations and the actions taken by the member states. In particular, Russia violated a number of principles of international law, the most fundamental one being the threat or the use of force, by starting a full-scale war against another sovereign state, Ukraine. All these shortcomings might substantially restrict the BRICS' ability to articulate and institutionalize its foreign policy objectives presenting a considerable matter for the grouping to solve if the five states wish to operate collectively in an efficient manner.

### 1.3 The relationship between the European Union and the BRICS

It is crucial to briefly overview the relationship between two rather different actors, the European Union, supranational political and economic union, and the BRICS, non-formal international organization, which is shaped by asymmetries and vagueness given their completely disparate capabilities, structures and approaches to multilateral governance. The relationship between these international actors is not consolidated and does not have a clearly defined cooperative or antagonistic character given the non-formality aspect and recency of the BRICS grouping. On the whole, with regard to exerting an influence within the global governance, the BRICS guided with the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention, stands for more equal international system emphasizing the South-South cooperation, while the European Union, guided with the principles of self-determination, respect for human rights, and protection of minorities, represents the status quo distribution of power promoting the democratic neoliberal Western order. Within a world order which undergoes progressive strategic rebalancing, the BRICS can present both an opportunity and a challenge for the EU (Rewizorski 2015). The grouping of the rising powers is able to display a positive and a negative prospect to the European Union insomuch as it embodies the growing share of the world's perspective markets and as it has a potential of politically representing a large segment of various emerging states which, in their turn, developed aptitude towards shaping the alternative international hierarchy in which in principle the EU is considered distant or even absent and in which at the present time the European close alliance struggles to find its rightful place. The trend towards increasing rapprochement among rising states with concrete consequences for the consolidated powers was clearly exemplified during the global financial crisis of 2008. The European Union, as the United States, face the decline since the 2008 crisis, in particular, it experienced a financial and sovereign debt crisis at the time. During the eurozone crisis, the EU, inter alia, depended on non-Western powers in finding solutions to the critical economic situation which allowed the emerging states to further pressure the European states in relation to their overrepresentation in the IFIs, such as the IMF and the WB (Keukeleire and Hoojimaaijers 2014). The fundamental difference in the normative framework of the EU and BRICS when it comes to international governance which will be elaborated on in the next chapter complicates the possibility of the strategic cooperation between the two and increases the probability of their structural disjuncture. Furthermore, this difference in value orientation, among other things, produces the discourses of inclusion, a partner, and exclusion, an enemy or the 'Other', which leaves no place for the intersection (Freire 2017). The lack of cooperation between these two international entities can be remarked though the manner in which the EU addresses the BRICS. Overall, the European Union prefers to engage with the BRICS countries

on a bilateral level rather than a multilateral one, thereby addressing the unofficial character of the grouping and not showing a desire to cooperate in the consolidation of the alliance. In the EU Global Strategy of 2016 in which one of the principal objectives is the enhancement of strategic partnership processes with the developing regions, all the BRICS members are mentioned, whereas the acronym itself is not stated once which demonstrates the EU's disregard towards the BRICS as an influential grouping. Moreover, while the official declaration did not mention South Africa, it devoted substantive attention to China and Russia. Because of geographical proximity and energy-related trade, Russia is presented as among the essential partners of the EU, at the same time posing major challenges to further collaboration in the light of the Ukrainian crisis. As for China, since it is becoming one of the most prominent powers on the international arena, both economically and politically, the European Union considers it a significant international actor whom it is essential to engage with in bilateral trade and economic and technological cooperation (Freire 2017). With regard to the rest of the BRICS members, the EU has a longstanding partnership with Brazil based upon mutually shared values and principles, such as democracy, fundamental freedoms, human rights, sustainable development and social inclusion, as stated on the official website of the EEAS. The EU is also among the leading trade partners of Brazil, only China surpassing the supranational organization. Their trade partnership is institutionalized through the *Southern Common Market* (MERCOSUR) which also includes Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela. India, one of the world's fastest growing economies, is an important trade and investment partner since the EU is its third largest trading party. As concerns South Africa, the EU signed a series of agreement with the Africa state, specifically, the *SA-EU Strategic Partnership* which aims at advancement of peace, security and stability in Africa and enhancement of regional cooperation, and the *Strategic Partnership Joint Action Plan* attempting to institutionalize this process of strengthening bilateral relations through high-level political talks and development, investment, educational, environmental, and cultural areas of coordination. Notwithstanding the fact that the two actors are contraposed regarding the fundamental international norms of the multilateral governance, the BRICS claim to be willing to operate and cooperate within the established international institutions, even if the states of the grouping advocate for the comprehensive reform of these organizations, thus opening a window of the formal engagement and constructive dialogue between the old and new establishment. As for the global trends that reflect the disparate capabilities between the two groups, according to the Eurostat data, the demographic figures show that the EU's share of the world population declines each half a century, and, in contrast, the BRICS' share experiences growth in this regard, excluding Russia, which is an important sign of the shift of balance towards regions which collectively will represent the larger portion of the world population.

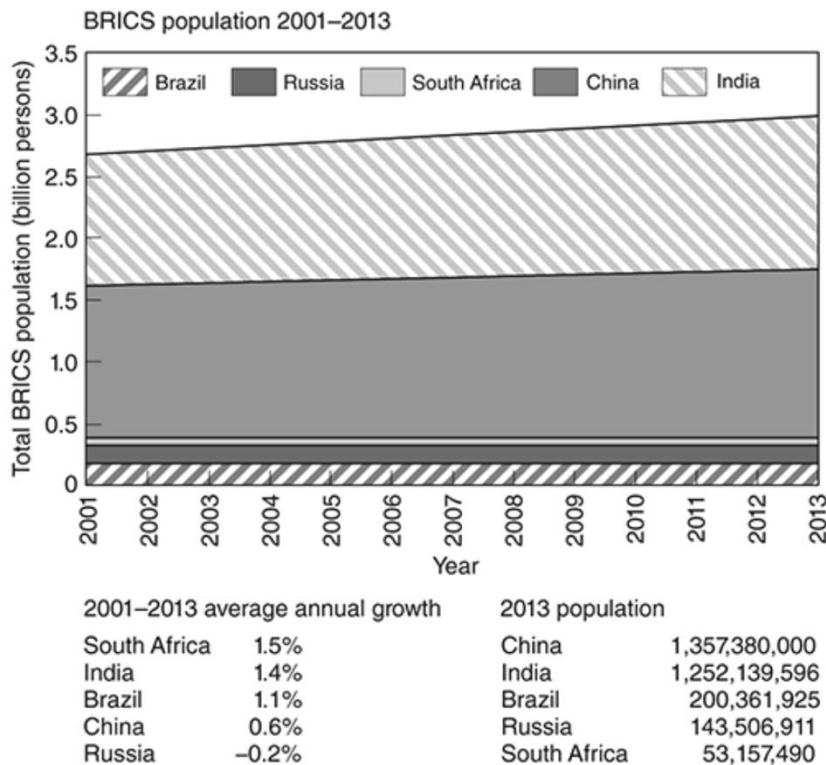


Figure 3. BRICS population (Source: Cooper 2016)

In terms of the economic potency, while the EU represents the largest share of the world GDP, it faces a downward trend, whereas the prospective of economic growth is more promising for the BRICS states (Freire 2017). In addition, trade interconnectedness between the EU and BRICS has considerably increased indicating the tendency for closeness in terms of economic cooperation. This data serves to emphasize the fact that the leading power as the European Union is already interlinked with the rising powers whose interests and needs the BRICS aspires to represent. Alongside with the BRICS, there is a constellation of the so-called ‘emerging power alliances’ within the Global South that embraces a wide range of states from different world regions, such as the whole of Asia, Latin America which were not visible when it came to the decision-making of the international affairs, and also Europe with the Northern America. These include the Brazil, South Africa, India, and China (BASIC), the already mentioned (IBSA), the Russia, India, and China (RIC), the *Association of Southeast Nations* (ASEAN), the *East Asia Summit* (EAS), the *Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation* (APEC), the *Trans-Pacific Partnership* (TPP), the *South Asian Free Trade Area* (SAFTA), and the *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (SCO). Only two groupings, the *Asia-Europe Meeting* (ASEM) being an informal process of dialogue and the *ASEAN Regional Forum* (ARF), aimed at a multilateral forum of preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region, incorporate the EU or its Member States as members. Both cooperation frameworks lacked a substantial progress in the declared domains which stems from a divergence of views regarding the means to achieve the end (Keukeleire and

Hoojimaaijers 2014). In addressing the issue of the change in the hierarchy of the global multilateral governance, the EU launched mainly bilateral strategic partnership agreements to sustain its external global influence according to its long-established principles and value orientation. The BRICS, attempting to embody the role of the leading coalition which represents the demand by the rising nations, confront the international status quo allocation of power and representation in the prominent global institutions and state that allocation of norms is a two-way process, not the generalization of the European model.

Country	Population (in m)	Total area (in 1,000 km <sup>2</sup> )	GDP (in b \$)
Brazil	202	8,515	2,246
Russia	141	17,098	2,097
India	1,267	3,287	1,877
China	1,370	9,596	9,240
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,980</b>	<b>38,496</b>	<b>15,460</b>
South Africa	52	1,221	350
As % of the BRIC	<b>1.7 %</b>	<b>3.2 %</b>	<b>2.2 %</b>

Table 1. BRIC countries' main figures and South Africa (Source: World Bank)

## 2. The soft power of the European Union and the BRICS

### 2.2 Theoretical framework

#### 2.2.1. Joseph Nye' theory of soft power

The term 'soft power' was coined by the prominent American scholar Joseph Nye in its book *Bound to Lead* in 1990 in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War in order to respond to the significantly evolved international environment and share his conception of foreign policy decision-making of international actors deemed relevant entering the new period of geopolitical history. While during the Cold War a majority of scholars was concentrated on examining the military power of states, Joseph Nye foresaw the new trend that would characterize the interactions between the global players in the upcoming centuries. Particularly, J. Nye's analysis focused primarily on the case of the USA which exited the long-standing tension in a clear advantage marking, as was claimed by F. Fukuyama, "the end of history" with a liberal democracy as an end-state vision for all (Fukuyama 1992). While acknowledging that the US resulted in the position of a world hegemon, Nye states that the global politics shift to multipolarity, that is a distribution of power among several international players, in contrast with bipolarity enjoyed by the US and the USSR during the Cold War. J. Nye concentrated his study on the change of power in world politics and introduced the new face of power which, as he argues, is more advantageous in interacting with other international actors. The basic dictionary definition of power is "an ability to do things and control others to get others to do what they otherwise would not" (Nye 1990). In the most traditional sense, reflecting the realist thought, the most powerful state was considered to be the one if it is the strongest in the art of war, thus placing insecurity as a principal existential threat. To possess such strength, a state is ought to have a series of tangible resources, such as "large population and territory, extensive natural resources, economic strength, military force, and social stability" which render the power measurable and concrete (Nye 2004). However, other factors begin to play major role, including "technology, education, and economic growth", and Nye argued that it is primarily these elements that would be critical for a state to "control political environment and get other countries to do what it wants" (Nye 1990). In addition to the emerging factors contributing to the state's strengthening, Nye underlined the fact that non-state actors, for example transnational corporations, had become progressively relevant in international relations contrasting the view of the realist theory which views a state as the only main actor. In order for the traditional state actors to remain afloat, it is opportune to form more sophisticated coalitions to efficiently conduct foreign affairs and influence the global agenda. Finally, the international relations became characterized by increasing interdependence which implies mutual dependence between states indicating an evident benefit of mutual cooperation, at present especially

in the areas of economy and climate change policy, and the unsustainable cost of the use of force. All these developments indicate the fact that the traditional realist focus on military power and tangible resources, also named as a 'hard power', overlooks the power of transnational ideas and fails to address the contemporary issues. Instead, as opposed to 'hard power' or 'command power', J. Nye suggested a more relevant exercise of power, 'soft power' or 'co-optive power', which better serves to achieve the outcomes desired by a state because it does not coerce other actors but incentivizes them to follow its policies. Soft power occurs "when one country gets other countries to *want* what it wants" and is associated with "intangible power resources, such as culture, ideology, and institutions" (Nye 1990). Later, Nye presented larger definition of soft power which is "the ability to affect others to obtain outcomes one wants through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion and payments. Whereas the ability of hard power to coerce grows out of a country's military or economic might, soft power arises from the attractiveness of its culture, political ideals/values, and policies" (Nye 2004). To illustrate the distinction between hard power which implies tangible resources and soft power with intangible resources, it is noteworthy to examine the case of the rising power, such as China and India, which have two largest populations worldwide, intensified economic growth and increased military capacities. The success of rising powers on the international scene will depend on their ability to convert their resources into strategies which will entail the preferred outcomes, rather than the possession of resources alone (Nye 2021). If to exert power on others is to influence and alter behavior of others, there are several ways to do so, such as to coerce with menace, the so-called 'sticks', to financially induce, the so-called 'carrots', or to attract other international actors with the principles, culture, institutions, and policies perceived as legitimate. Instead of threats or money, soft power uses "attraction to shared values and the justness and duty of contributing to the achievement of those values" (Nye 2004). Soft power mainly stems from three resources which are culture of society, political values, and foreign policies, and the principal prerequisite to successfully spread them and attract others is legitimacy and moral authority of these policies, meaning that the way in which a state which exercises soft power is perceived by a target is crucially important (Nye 2004). The reception of effective policies by targets can be expressed through such qualities as admiration, respect, and emulation producing adherence and responsiveness (Nye 2011). The exercise of soft power reflects the core concept of a constructivist theory of international relations which is the social construction of a state's identity, and an idea that states perceive each other according to the constructed identities built through states' actions. The basic example is the fact that the USA perceive nuclear weapons of the UK as less threatening than the ones of North Korea due to sharply diverse identities and shared perceptions. As for soft power, a state will exercise it the most successfully in case of positive perception of its constructed identity by the target. In order to get an

outcome a state wishes, it should exercise its soft power through the co-optive means, the assets which produce soft power, which are persuasion, agenda-setting, and, as was mentioned before, attraction (Nye 2011). Joseph Nye built its theory of soft power based on the case of the US which is considered one of the most successful soft powers worldwide, albeit having a number of failed attempts of exerting soft power, for example during the Iraqi War. Within the soft power the American influence was the most consolidated in the power of agenda-setting through the international institutions established by the prominent American politicians starting from the end of the World War II. The role of the United States was dominant in defining principles and institutions of international regimes. The American soft power came with Marshall Plan aimed to reconstruct Europe after devastating war consequences, then it continued with the international economic institutions, such as the IMF and the WTO, which successfully transmitted liberal values, free-market principles of capitalism and democratic ideology of the American society. The US had made their policies seen as legitimate, hence effectively spreading its soft power, and introduced the framework of international relations within which the states operate worldwide. Alongside with the global order framework shaped majorly by the American soft power, the US also create a popular culture which became predominant in the world, marking the American domination of popular communication. The USA seemed to set the tone to almost everything globally, from politics and culture to fashion: Japanese or then Soviet teenagers who had never went to the US wore the American teenagers' typical clothing items, listened to American-produced music, watched American-produced shows and movies and some of them went to and still go to the American universities. Notably, the American external image represented values of democracy and human rights, much like the European Union these days. As Nye stated, seduction is more efficient than coercion, and principles of democracy, human rights, and individual opportunities are heavily seductive (Nye 2004). Having understood the importance and effectiveness of soft power as a tool of influence, prominent states started to develop their own soft power strategies, hence, it is crucial to assess state external policies in terms of soft power and view soft power strategies as inseparable from the overall state foreign policy. Credibility is crucial for an effective exercise of soft power, especially nowadays in an age of surplus of information, and America's success is partly due to the openness of its society and policy-making and also to the possibility of correcting and criticizing of the governmental actions by a free media and citizens (Nye 2008). This aspect of transparency is significant to get others to want the outcomes you wish since it successfully deals with the issue of understanding the targeting audience and advantageously influence how others hear your message and adapt it (Nye 2008). Such values of democracy, freedom, the alleviation of poverty, and human rights manage to attract many others, inter alia, due to the fact that they address both individual and collective aspirations and necessities and may seem applicable



and wished for many humans irrespective of nationhood, ethnicity, cultural background, and so on (Roselle, Miskimmon, and O'Loughlin 2014). One of the most successful cases of exercise of soft power by the USA is the effective democracy promotion which can be traced through several uprisings in non-democratic states for the sake of democratic values embodied by the American society. In particular, the American soft power influence was deemed successful insofar as it contributed through promotion of democratic values to the electoral revolutions in the post-communist states. Prior to the actual riots, the United States had, in large part, devoted its democracy promotion to the states within the post-communist region (Kroenig, McAdam, and Weber 2010). The *United States Agency for International Development* (USAID) which “advances U.S. national security and economic prosperity and demonstrates American generosity” and promotes “democratic governance and human rights” which “are critical components of sustainable development and lasting peace”, dedicated its democratic assistance largely more to the post-communist states than to the rest of the world (USAID; Kroenig, McAdam, and Weber 2010). Partly as a legacy of the Cold War, the US continued its attempts to attract and transform the proximate region of the former rival with its values, culture and ideology. The result of the successful soft power exercise is argued to be the high precedent of attempts of revolutions the post-communist, ‘targeted’ states, such as the “color revolutions” in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan which strived for democratic regimes, basic civil and social rights and freedoms aspiring to the ideals the American society represents (Kroenig, McAdam, and Weber 2010). Some scholars argue that in the absence of the US soft power campaign there is a probability that the uprisings would be less significant or would not even occur (Kroenig, McAdam, and Weber 2010). In contrast, the United States failed its soft power strategy to attract the Iraqi population who became hostile to the American domination during the Iraq War. Specifically, the US conducted an information campaign in order to legitimize the American invasion in Iraq and to promote its principles and culture among the Iraqi population. However, a majority of the Iraqi population condemned the US invasion and claimed that it had created more violence than it prevented (Kull 2008). The United States lacked credibility and integrity in the eyes of the Iraqi people and contravened their core interests seeming to act in self-interest and failing to get the outcome it wished for (Kroenig, McAdam, and Weber 2010). In fact, Nye claimed that if policies of a state stand out as self-serving, there is a high probability of hindering the exercise of soft power (Nye 2008). Moreover, if a state policy appears as a “mere window dressing for hard power projection”, which most likely occurred during the Iraq War, it is meant to fail (Nye 2008). These cases demonstrate that exerting soft power influence is a complex and peculiar external action which entails shaping international outcomes. Nevertheless, although a successful exercise of soft power is highly beneficial for a state’s position in international relations, it is only one component of state

power and is not sufficient alone. The ability to effectively combine hard and soft power is called a 'smart power' which implicates the idea that the two kinds of power reinforce each other rather than undermine each other (Nye 2021). In some case, an instrument of hard power can even become the source of soft power, for instance a well-run military which ensures peace can attract others. Nye argued that although soft power does not depend on hard power, if a state experiences economic and military weakening it does not only lose its hard power but also its attractiveness as a soft power (Nye 2004). Such declining power will not be able to provide attractive sources, such as economic aid, to others and will lose an ability to shape the international agenda and international relations. Thus, it is argued that the effective combination of hard and soft components of power, smart power, is the most efficacious and successful strategy.

### 2.2.2. Beyond J. Nye's theory

It is also crucial to examine the soft power theory elaborated by other academics, especially in relation to the rising powers which also pursue successful soft power strategies along with the consolidated states. While realist school of international relations is highly antithetical to the soft power theory, the realists, such as J. Morgenthau, admitted the benefits the power of diplomacy provides, and among the nine elements of power he had identified, there are also national morale and character, state diplomacy, and the quality of government highly correspond to the intangible resources Nye had pinpointed. Kenneth N. Waltz, a theorist of defensive realism, also claimed that the "a competition becomes more comprehensive as well as more widely extended. Not only just military preparation but also economic growth and technological development become matters of intense and constant concern" (Waltz 1980, p. 172). Gilpin also stressed the importance of the factors other than army, economic might, and technological progress, that are also influential in global politics, such as public morale and public leadership naming it "prestige" (Gilpin 1981, p. 13). The scholar Sheng Ding also stated that the traditional realist assumptions of coercion fail to consider the full development of China's national power abroad and influence it exerts on other international actors, particularly, the realist thinkers are unable to examine the soft power component which makes a large part of the general framework of Chinese foreign policy (Ding 2010). He argues that the concept of soft power was comprehensively used by ancient Chinese rulers, such as Sun Zi (544-496 BC) and Mo Zi (470-390 BC) centuries ago, contesting the idea that the soft power was invented by the Western states (Ding 2010). One of the most significant Chinese ideologies is Confucianism which commends gaining leadership by setting an example for the other rather than coercing the other which is a key tenet of the established soft power theory (Ding 2010). In fact, Mo Zi, founder of Mohism, advocated for the philosophy of non-offensive and potency of moral government (Ding

2010). Most importantly, an ancient Chinese military general Sun Tzu in his foundation *The Art of War* underlined the efficiency of winning over the enemy's mind stating that

“to gain a hundred victories in a hundred battles is not the highest excellence; to subjugate the enemy's army without doing battle is the highest of excellence. Therefore, the best warfare strategy is to attack the enemy's plans, next is to attack alliances, next is to attack the army, and the worst is to attack a walled city” (Ding 2010).

Therefore, the Chinese politics have a long-lasting legacy of soft power strategy which can be traced in the Chinese agenda of foreign policy to the present day in its wielding of multipolar world order with due representation of rising powers. Moreover, Ding mentioned that the Chinese soft power, having received little attention in the academic circles, is being conceptualized and incorporated in the modern policy-making also based on the ancient practices alongside with the current theories, predominantly the Nye's ones (Ding 2010). Ding noticed the conceptual shortcomings of Nye's theorization and states that Nye's formulation of soft power theory was, as previously noted, based on the case study of the US hegemony, threats to it and its preservation (Ding 2010). While during the modern times the theory of soft power is largely formulated and built up by the American scholar J. Nye, it is important to recognize that this formulation was predominantly based on the US example and experience, thus, it is a limited concept and cannot be generalized, for example, in the case of China and other rising powers, it is important to look at the historic experience and peculiarities of each nation and its culture.

## 2.2 The soft power of the European Union

### 2.2.1. The European Union as a civilian normative power

As an international actor, the European Union, economic and political union of twenty-seven European nations aimed at close regional integration, is a somewhat sui generis entity in public international law that was developed relatively recently. The 2016 Global Strategy of the European Union starts with the statement: “The purpose, even existence, of our Union is being questioned” (EU 2016). It is indeed a unique and even a novel kind of power, being an intergovernmental alliance with the supranational legal bodies that has features of both a state and an international organization. On the whole, within the inter-state interactions the European Union has broader competences than an ordinary international organization, such as the BRICS for instance, while having less power than a state in what traditionally is called Westphalian state-centric system which is a fundamental principle in international law. The peculiarity of the actorness of the EU led to several categories of analysis, such as realist, civilian power, and normative power. As an important global major power, the European Union possesses a number of the influential and potent instruments that makes it one of the most prominent international actors. Primarily and most significantly, the EU is considered to be an economic power arguably having this strength at the core of its actual and potential power and at the foundation of its international actorness. In addition, one of the most peculiar characteristics of the European Union is its military weakness insofar as it lacks joint supranational autonomy of action in the military area. While this salient feature of the European Union is considered to be its deficiency by realists, it led many other scholars to believe that it represents the so-called civilian or normative power as a global actor. From a point of view of realist thinkers, among which the most fundamental ones being Morgenthau, Waltz, and Mearsheimer, the international system is state-centric and anarchist in which a state, as a unitary rational actor resorts to self-help due to inherent insecurity between the actors. While the last Lisbon Treaty of the EU contributed to the more profound cooperation in the sphere of foreign affairs between the Member States, this domain is still considered as the most retained in the individual decision-making of the Member States, hence, in the eyes of the realists the EU is characterized as a weak actor in comparison to the state actors due to its nature and consequent issues of policy-making. In order to survive in the self-help scenario, the states help themselves by gaining power, especially military capacities, since the strongest state in this domain is likely to be the most powerful among others. Referring to the Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*, in the realist language of power, one can be potent as Athens, or helpless as Melos (Thucydides 1920). Since the ultimate ratio of power is war, an actor without sufficient military capabilities, such as the EU, is intrinsically weak as an international actor. Moreover, realists

reject the relevance of moral principles in international relations, thus denying the power of diplomacy and attraction and, in consequence, soft power. The EU external action is strongly characterized by recourse to diplomatic means and tools of attraction in the tradition of soft power promoting its fundamental values, such as democracy, good governance, respect for human rights, and basic human freedoms. Thus, the EU, as a power-promoter of its principles which are largely moral, is not able to effectively shape international agenda and governance according to the realists. However, presently, the EU, comprised of 27 European states, is considered as one of the strongest international actors globally precisely thanks to many of its aspects which are deemed as weak within a realist thought. All in all, the realist theory of international relations fails to effectively grasp the strong aspects of the power of the EU. In contrast, civilian and normative power analyses succeed at efficaciously examine the nature of the EU actorness and aspects of its power. The civilian power analysis was put forward by F. Duchêne (1973), according to whom, the EU is a civilian, i.e. not having military instruments at its disposal, power which can become a strength, rather than a weakness, as stated by realists (Duchêne 1973). The origin of the civilian nature of the EU dates back to the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which demonstrated the devastating consequences of the military power logic in international relations. As a result, the European states put non-military, civilian, ideology at its core, and hence placed economics and diplomacy, rather than military might, as instruments of its external action and international influence (Wright 2011). In fact, Duchêne argued that the EU is able to break out from the *realpolitik* logic only by becoming a force which diffuses civilian and democratic standards globally (Duchêne 1973). According to Maull, there are three key elements in defining a civilian power, such as cooperation with other actors pursuing international objectives, an emphasis on non-military instruments, in the case of Europe being primarily economic ones, in securing these objectives, and an increased use of supranational elements in dealing with vital issues of international management (Maull 1990). Maull claimed that forming a part of the post-Cold War international order, the EU is a functioning laboratory combining these features of a civilian power (Maull 1990). The success of the EU as a civilian power can be seen through the enlargement of the union to a large number of the Eastern European countries after the fall of Berlin in 1989 and establishment of bilateral and multilateral trade regimes globally. As Rosecrance and Ginsberg noted, the EU has a magnetic force attracting rather than pushing other states (Rosecrance 1998; Ginsberg 1999). This demonstrates that realist thinkers overlooked the actual source of strength of the EU, and the civilian power analysts pointed out the advantage of an emphasis on soft power and the EU powerful capability of engagement of other states (Smith 2004). In its turn, the normative power analysis, largely theorized by I. Manners, echoes the civilian power analysis insofar as it also emphasized the EU past ‘learned lessons’ at the core of its actorness and indicates that the EU is the

most effective when resorting to its soft power assets. However, unlike the civilian power analysis, the normative power analysis underlines what the EU *is*, besides what it does, hence the symbolism of what the EU represents and promotes worldwide. According to this perspective, the EU, being a novel and *sui generis* power among the international actors, transformed the international order by mere existence and its unique structure. As Manners put it, “simply by existing as different [...] the European Union changes the normality of international relations” (Manners 2008, p. 65). Moreover, Rosecrance argued that the EU was a new type of an international actor which is inherently innocuous and magnetic to others (Rosecrance 1998). Therefore, for normative power analysts, the role of norms and principles of European foreign policy play a crucial role in the EU foreign action. The European identity was first codified in the *Declaration on European Identity* (1973) issued by the then European Community which stated that the European states were “determined to defend the principles of representative democracy, of the rule of law, of social justice – which is the ultimate goal of economic progress – and of respect for human rights” (Declaration on European Identity 1973). According to Manners, there are nine substantive normative principles which constitute the EU identity and which the EU represents and promotes globally as part of its soft power exercise, such as sustainable peace, freedom, democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, equality, social solidarity, sustainable development and good governance (Manners 2008). These crucial constitutive factors legitimize the EU external action and largely determine the EU policies towards other international actors. The EU claims to prefer ‘carrots’ rather than ‘sticks’ in its foreign policy fostering negotiation, conflict prevention and peacekeeping and aiming for regional cooperation and multilateral solutions (Sjursen 2007). As it was mentioned earlier, Nye affirmed that principles of democracy, human rights, and individual opportunities are heavily seductive when he had analyzed the case of the United States’ soft power influence (Nye 2004). Nevertheless, there is substantive difference between the soft power image of the US and the EU which was concisely outlined by Robert Kagan with a somewhat sexist statement: “on major strategic and international questions today, Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus” (Kagan 2004). He grasped that while the American external image of soft power has been decreasing due to unpopular military actions and increasingly ‘hard’ foreign policy, the EU rather embodied ‘soft’ instruments of external decision-making, specifically, diplomacy, cooperation and peacemaking making itself attractive for states to follow its policies. Performing a special role different from other global actors, the supranational union transfers and diffuses its principles and norms to the third states through the enlargement processes, trade agreements, and a wide spread of its regulatory regimes worldwide. A notable example would be the fact that since 1995 it was decided by the European Council that all agreements signed by this institution would contain the clauses on human rights and democratic

principles. Within the enlargement processes, the EU elaborated the so-called *Copenhagen Criteria* which envisage the conditions the potential candidates have to adopt in order to become a Member State of the EU. These criteria, presenting a strong political image, include a stable democracy, rule of law, a functioning market economy, preservation of human rights, and the acceptance of the EU legislation.

### 2.2.2. The exercise of the EU soft power

Via these conditions the EU is able to successfully transform other international actors and their policies towards the values promoted by the EU, especially during the extensive Eastern enlargement. Some scholars mentioned that the biggest success of the EU soft power influence could be observed in its immediate neighborhood in which there is “an enormous political and economic leverage and where there is a strong and ever-growing convergence of norms and values” but it could not have such effects in farther regions with more diverse cultural background and value-orientation (Zielonka 2008, p. 471). As for close regional cooperation, the EU normally establishes the so-called association agreements and the more general regional cooperation agreements. The former instrument implicates a bilateral agreement of closer economic collaboration, according to which the EU principles have to be adopted by the third state in exchange for the increased access to its markets. The latter agreement can be demonstrated through an example of the *EU Neighborhood Policy* (ENP) which is a close regional cooperation between the EU and its Mediterranean neighbors, notably its Eastern and Southern Mediterranean proximate neighbors. Via this cooperation arrangement the supranational union promotes its basic values and principles, effectively exerting its soft power influence, to sixteen partner states, including Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Lebanon and others, in order to “foster stability, security and prosperity in the EU's neighboring regions” (EU 2021). In addition, the most symbolic exercise of normative power by the EU is the abolition of death penalty worldwide. In contrast with realist and civilian power methods of analysis which see the lack of military capabilities as a reason why the EU resorts to soft power, the normative power analysis states that the EU deliberately uses diplomatic instruments of attraction as a result of its history and the consequential processes towards deep integration in the tradition of Kant's perpetual peace. Despite the fact that the EU is not a traditional state actor, it is one of the most potent international actors due to an extensive display of economic, diplomatic and legal instruments it is able to exert influence. The EU is compound of 27 Member States with approximately 500 million inhabitants comprising “a quarter of the world's GNP and roughly 40 per cent of its merchandise exports” (Zielonka 2008, p. 474). The EU domestic currency, the euro, is the second most significant world currency in trade

and international reserve after the US dollar. The supranational union is one of the most important regulatory powers given that the European norms and regulations, in particular on environmental protection, financial markets, food and health protection, and data privacy, are adopted by other states globally (Bach and Newman 2007). Regulating global markets, together with the US, the EU produces about 80 per cent of international norms and standards, and China, for instance, has applied the EU regulations in automotive industry and food security (Zielonka 2008). The vast export by the EU of its regulations and norms also witness its successful soft power exercise since it does not force others but persuade them to do what is in their interest (Young and Peterson 2006). What's more, the EU is one of the biggest aid providers for developmental purposes allocating over €2 billion which constitutes around 40 per cent of international assistance for development (Zielonka 2008). As for the EU foreign policy, its strong suit can be represented though the fact that the EU diplomats meet about 100 times a year and adopt the same number of joint communiqués, declarations and statements, and the EU CFSP common framework becomes gradually more unifying in terms of a joint action of all Member States to strive for a collective foreign policy activity on behalf of the cohesive EU (Zielonka 2008). In order to complement and strengthen its soft power exercise of attraction, the EU uses its economic might and its attractive market, which is its strongest asset, through the aforementioned association agreements and more general cooperation economic agreements, and, as a result, the third states adopt norms and necessary measures to transform their market conditions so that they resemble the EU internal market which is based on the four basic freedoms of movement, specifically, of persons, goods, services and capital. Arguably, the biggest attractive power of the EU is unveiled in the access to its markets since the overwhelming majority is somehow institutionally connected with it (Wright 2011). For instance, within the EU general framework of developing "a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighborhood" bringing territorially proximate states as close as possible, Tunisia, having concluded the Euro-Mediterranean agreement with the EU, was supposed to approximate its legislation to that of the EU and improve its standing on democratic values and respect for human rights (Zielonka 2008; EU Commission 2003). In addition to the economic and trade instruments at the EU disposal, the objective of the union to promote its image and values externally and institutionalize its rule of law also encompass investing in an infrastructure, collaboration in the sphere of border control, transport, energy and telecommunications networks, addressing security issues, cross-border cultural links, and so on (Zielonka 2008). The EU soft power influence was proved highly successful in the Eastern Europe, as eleven Eastern European joined the union since 2004 embracing the EU norms and principles of democracy, good governance, liberal market economy and respect for human rights (Dimitrova and Pridham 2007). Moreover, nowadays several post-Soviet states in the region, such as Georgia and



Ukraine, demonstrate adherence to the principles and ideology the EU represents and aspire to the union membership. In particular, recent Georgian people's uprisings against a 'foreign agent' bill contraposed the influence of the former regional hegemon, Russian Federation, with the 'benevolent' power, the EU, which stands for the opposite *modus operandi*. Ukraine, currently suffering from the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation, promptly signed a formal request to enter the EU, and recently the Ukrainian President Zelenskiy proposed a symbolic initiative to celebrate "the Day of Europe" on May 9 as opposed to the Victory Day, a very important day of victory over fascism in the World War II for the modern Russia and the former USSR. However, in contrast with the culturally close Eastern European states, the EU struggles to exert the same scale of soft power influence in other world regions whose value system is different, such as African and Asian states. The union lacks sufficient leverage farther regions, especially the big rising powers, such as China which symbolizes a completely distinct vision of governance and value-orientation. Other rising power, such as India and Brazil are also less receptive to the EU values and global policies which could be observed during the discussion of the controversial 'Singapore issues' in the WTO that included labor and environmental standards: the EU which rooted for the adaptation of these standards was opposed by 20 rising global actors (Zielonka 2008). Hence, although the EU is one of the most important civilian and normative powers worldwide, the EU global normative agenda which is a significant part of its soft power, is being currently challenged by developing states which embody different principles governing world order.

## 2.3 The soft power of the BRICS

### 2.3.1. The political ideology of the BRICS member-states

The BRICS is an intergovernmental grouping composed of five states, such as China, Russia, India, Brazil, and South Africa, representing four continents and having a strong narrative of the rising powers rooting for the comprehensive transformation of global governance towards the post-Western multipolar system to counterbalance the consolidated prominent states from Europe and North America. Similar to the EU, the BRICS are uneasy to identify due to informality of the group and a lack of institutionalization and integration between the members. It is not a formal international organization, nor a group action, but rather a grouping based on “the additive sum of individual preferences” (Brosig 2021, p. 3). The grouping has a clearly articulated rhetoric, value-orientation and principles on how the intra-state global governance and the dynamics within the international institutions must be. Simplistically speaking, the basic rhetoric claims that while the international players, like the European Union, which historically were behind the creation of the present key international institutions, currently enjoy the overwhelmingly vast power of shaping the international order and deciding on vital global issues, the rest of the international actors are being heavily underrepresented having a sharply different, it is to say disadvantageous, standing on the same international matters. As Tharoor justly noted, the significant point of confluence of the BRICS members, is the sentiment of exclusion from the deserved legitimate place in world governance (Tharoor 2016). The BRICS aspire to represent the ‘disadvantaged’ emerging powers claiming to fulfil the demand of the extensive reform in the international relations. The inner group mechanisms are embodied in the form of annual summits and official group statements following each summit. Exerting its collective, or ‘compound’ soft power influence (Gallarotti 2016), the BRICS states promote a set of values which attract many states which are predominantly non-Western and are underrepresented in the international governance. Brazil’s display of its soft power instruments is its history of pacifism, scarcity of hard power sources, and leadership in multilateral organization (Chatin 2016). Having the largest population in the world, India represents a multicultural and multireligious society while being a somewhat stable democracy. Over thousand years, India was a place of refuge for people of different religious and cultural backgrounds, such as Jews, Parsis, Muslims, etc. (Tharoor 2016). Its film industry, Bollywood, is one of the most prosperous globally being a solid contender to the most famous cinema industry, such as the American Hollywood. South Africa is one of the most liberal African states having a liberal constitution and a major process of democratization with an iconic politician Nelson Mandela. Being an economic superpower, China has abundant tangible resources to effectively back up its soft power influence undertaking developmental projects all around the globe. Russia embarked on a number of initiatives promoting

its appeal as a soft power, such as the international TV station *Russia Today*, the 2014 Winter Olympic games in Sochi and the 2018 football World Cup (Gallarotti 2016). In 2014 Russia set up its own soft-power strategy named “Integrated Strategy for Expanding Russia’s Humanitarian Influence in the World” in order to, as Foreign Minister Lavrov claimed, oppose the attempts of discretization of the Russian politics (Stuenkel 2016). Nevertheless, it is important to focus on the soft power the BRICS states expresses within the grouping.

### 2.3.2. The formal and informal operating principles of the BRICS

M. Brosig argues that the BRICS have two types of operating principles, such as the semi-codified principles stated in the summit declarations and informal rules which are internally oriented and can be observed through the BRICS meetings (Brosig 2021). The former operating principles can be also addressed as a soft kind of codification of rules without any legal basis, whereas the latter informally shape the interactions between the members forming a sort of a code of conduct which also indicates their vision of the general inter-state relations. As for semi-codified principles, the BRICS stand for ideally unconstrained state sovereignty, sovereign equality, opposition against unilateral military interventions which are often conducted by the Western powers, and more multipolar, representative, thus just, rule-based global order.

	Semi-codified principles	Informal rules
Internal operation	BRICS is a state-led process Favoring multi-polarity Rule-based order BRICS is no strategic alliance	Do not openly criticize a member, avoid contestation Do not talk about domestic opposition/problems Provide a safe international environment for leaders Consensus rule Promote a non-Western identity Mutually accept national interests in international relations (carving out of regional backyards)
Global order views	Ideally unconstrained sovereignty Sovereign equality Opposition against unilateral (western) military interventions Favoring multi-polarity Rule-based order	

Table 2. BRICS operating principles (Source: Brosig 2021)

Despite the fact that the BRICS members aspire to the novel kind of configuration of world power sharing, they highly prioritize an orthodox concept of Westphalian sovereignty of states fostering its protection from any external intervention. Having roots in the realist theory of international relations, the existential question of protection of sovereignty comes from the tradition of decolonization and of the Bandung principles followed by the members. The five states strongly underline the cruciality of the sovereign equality and territorial integrity of all states and, consequently, the rejection of neo-imperial international conduct. Such a vigorously pronounced message refers to the military interventions in the sovereign states carried out by the Western powers, especially the United States, which are deemed as illegitimate and unauthorized use of power by the more powerful actors against the weaker ones. In particular, the BRICS members refer to the disproportionate portion of power enjoyed by a particular group of states and the constructed feigned façade behind it, i.e. the use of liberal and humanitarian rhetoric to justify these interventions for the purpose of the regime overthrow, thus a blatant external interference into the domestic affairs of a state. For instance, the BRICS, having two members with the veto power in the Security Council, criticized the UNSC resolution of 1973 which led to the NATO's military intervention in Libya and fearing the repetition of events, decisively opposed the vote on Syria in the name of protection of its right of sovereignty (Läidi 2011). During the Sanya Summit of 2011 the BRICS proclaimed that "the use of force should be avoided and [...] the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of each nation should be respected" (BRICS Brasilia Declaration 2019, par. 9). In addition, in their official declaration following the Durban Summit of 2013 they also stated that they "condemn unilateral military interventions and economic sanctions" (BRICS eThekweni Declaration 2013, p. 24). In general, there are accusations of hypocrisy and double standards of the West by the BRICS in referring to the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan and incoherency with their own principles, for instance human rights violations in Guantánamo Bay, as well (Lipton 2017). Connected with the principle of equal state sovereignty, the BRICS actively promotes an equitable multilateralism and democratization of international relations calling for the more just representation of the Global South. The grouping has realized this demand mostly in an economic sphere through creation of its own economic institutions, such as the NDB for wide-scale infrastructure projects and funds in the area of developmental aid, to consolidate the 'south-south' cooperation and counterweight the traditional international organizations in which the uneven display of power and the domination of the West are claimed to take place. Even the creation of the grouping itself demonstrates this ambition since it is composed of the most prominent rising states with quite dynamic population and economic growth, especially China, India, and Brazil, with a formal bridge with the powerful state of the West, such as China and Russia, and formal representation of the African continent, such as South Africa, which

gives substantial credibility securing its soft power exercise. As for the informal rules of conduct between the grouping members which nonetheless transmits their values, there can be distinguished a few of them which are the unspoken rule of no open criticism and contestation, not mentioning domestic problems, a guarantee of safe international environment for leaders, a rule of consensus, promotion of non-Western identity, and mutual acceptance of national interests in international relations. Although the five states are in the same grouping like BRICS, there are some bilateral tensions between the members, such as for example territorial disputes between China and India on the status of Kashmir, however, as became apparent from the grouping meetings, the states do not openly criticize each other keeping neutrality even in case of bilateral conflicts in order to continue effective cooperation (Brosig 2021). The similar mechanism of omission is present regarding the domestic affairs of the members as well. The BRICS states deliberately choose to leave out their domestic issues, especially those that are controversial and conflictive, thus following the principle of non-interference in the domestic politics too. In contrast to the EU which promotes a particular type of political regime, such as democracy, the BRICS members that vary from democracy to autocracy, do not have a standard for a political system positively disregarding this aspect when it comes to international engagement and cooperation and ensuring a friendly environment to all the forms of political establishment. The grouping has a silent rule of no opposition: it is not customary to criticize the way other state's leader handles the domestic affairs (Brosig 2021). This principle could be observed during the attempt by Western powers to put sanctions and isolate Russia because of the annexation of Crimea in 2014. For the BRICS members, reflecting the realist logics, the issue of Ukraine for Russia is the Russia's own regional sphere of influence and core security concerns, therefore, it is not expected to condemn and intervene in what is considered as almost domestic politics, in the same manner as it is not expected for other members to judge the Chinese politics in the South Asian region. During the struggle to revoke the Russian membership in G20 which ultimately failed, the BRICS foreign ministers issued the statement which declared that "the custodianship of the G20 belongs to all Member States equally and no one Member State can unilaterally determine the exclusion of another Member State from the Summit" (BRICS Foreign Ministers 2014). Such support and commitment on behalf of the BRICS members increase the credibility of their principles and proclaimed ideology in the eyes of other emerging global players and improve the efficiency of their soft power exercise of persuading like-minded others to follow their example. Another informal principle which provides the mechanism of protection, is decision by consensus, meaning that all the official declarations and following decisions are taken with consensus of all the grouping members, thus each of the state has a possibility to shape an agenda and guarantee its input. The BRICS' operating principles are constructed in the way that would

provide the mutual respect and accommodation of each member's diverse interests and conduct of domestic and international affairs. In addition, these principles mainly represent the contrast to the Western organizations reflecting the long-standing demand of diversification of power-sharing in international relations and demonstrating other emerging powers with the similar set of pretenses that the BRICS countries aspire to take a leader role in reforming the global governance.

### 2.3.3. The advantages the BRICS provides in terms of soft power

As a result of the BRICS proclaimed principles and value-orientation and their standing regarding international governance, Brosig argues that the grouping provides a number of tangible advantages, which are support for domestic regime stability, protection from unwanted external interferences, flexibility and multiplicity of alignments, and a leverage of regional power, for other rising global players in terms of foreign policy valued added which are highly effective in exerting their soft power influence (Brosig 2021). First of all, the club-like grouping provides support for domestic regime stability. Highly respecting the principle of non-interference into one's domestic politics, the BRICs tend to respect the status quo and existing political framework and support stability and order of an internal regime, rather than to challenge the counterpart. Whereas the EU, cooperating with other states, includes clauses on respect for human rights, democracy and other values it is based on and promotes which seem as an imposition of their principles on others by many, the BRICS is able to exercise political cooperation free of similar conditionalities guaranteeing no criticism internal politics and offering vast flexibility on such issues. Secondly, the BRICS' exercise of soft power leans on its competence to shield off unwanted external interference. Having a concrete influence on resolution in the UNSC and a definitive rhetoric against unjustified interventions from the outside, the BRICS is able to offer support to those who claim to suffer the external interference by using a veto power and blocking the legitimate means for presumed illegitimate means. Thirdly, the BRICS symbolize the capability to forge flexible and multiple alignments rather than fixed and constant alliances. This way of forming the institutionalized cooperation appears more effective in an increasing decentralized, multipolar and multi-order global system of governance allowing to form a multitude of advantageous groupings which are alternative to the dominant coalitions, thus, giving possibility for less powerful actors to operate outside of the consolidated long-standing framework and still to be able to influence the global agenda. Finally, the wide possibility of the BRICS members to preserve their regional priorities which is frequently criticized is also a source of a leverage of their regional power and an indication that the members of this grouping mutually respect each other's regional agendas. The BRICS grouping also spread into the regional agendas and formulate cooperation policies in the regional sphere being able to improve the member's standing in its region.

The prominent example of this could be South Africa which elevated the visibility and global representation of the grouping and formulated its regional backyard policies of closer collaboration. Although these benefits provided by the BRICS are widely characterized by the realist logic and *realpolitik*, they are a substantial source of its soft power influence insofar as they are closely intertwined with a rather articulate logic of the ideal world order, hence in principle it is coherent and credible, they are backed up by the acquainted power and standing in international relations together with strong economic performance, and they are responsive to the demands and needs of a large number of less strong and rising states which believe to operate on the margins of the present international system. The peculiar heterogeneous configuration and geographic spreading of the BRICS actually improves its soft power influence (Gallarotti 2016). As Gallarotti put it, “each member brings a soft power profile that can serve to complete the profiles of other nations” (Gallarotti 2016, p. 6). It is argued that since each member’s distinctive strong suits in the soft power exercise merge together, the grouping is in a more advantageous position compared to the clusters that are based on common traits which could prevent the effective exerting of attractive influence. Such a diverse bloc, due to diverse geopolitical environments, provides a mutually supportive mix of soft power profiles (Thussu 2016). What is more, India, Brazil and South Africa representing purely developing nations aptly complement and balance the ‘great’ powers with a large legacy, China and Russia. The extensive geographical space gives the BRICS a truly global dimension to employ soft power influence. The Chinese lobbying on the inclusion of South Africa as a member was carried out specifically for the purpose of greater representation and legitimacy among third world states, in particular in Africa (Zanardi 2016). The feature of being traditional civilizations which are China, India and Russia supplements the ingénue effects of the younger nations, such as Brazil and South Africa (Gallarotti 2016).

#### 2.3.4. The exercise of the BRICS soft power

With such an advantageously diverse profile and articulated ideology, the grouping is engaged in a number of attempted reforms on international issues of the foremost importance, such as developmental agenda, climate change, food security, regulation of international financial institutions, trade, and globalization of regional issues. Aside from attempting to solve regional matters of political instability in North Africa and Middle East, the BRICS possess a series of unilateral undertakings which nevertheless enhance the standing of the whole grouping, such as the participation of Russia during the Middle East Quartet negotiations on an Israeli-Palestine conflict resolution, the Brazilian role of the host of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Global Forum on global cooperation in 2010, the 2010 World Expo held in China, the 2010 Commonwealth games in Delhi, the 2013 World Student

games in Russia, the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics conducted in Russia, the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Olympics in Brazil, and so on (BRICS Second Summit 2010 and BRICS Deputy Foreign Ministers Meeting on the Situation 2015). The principal tool of the grouping that complements the intangible resources and institutionalizes its soft power is the NDB which focuses on financing development projects and infrastructure of largely developing states. While its capitalization is moderate compared to the traditional international financial institutions, such as the IMF, it fulfilled the role of altering the present normative paradigm (Gallarotti 2016). The conditions of lending offered by the IMF were deliberately constructed to be friendlier to the South that considers the Western model exploitative being a doubtless benefit for the attractiveness of the image of the BRICS. Another advantage held by the BRICS over the European countries is its tabula rasa effect when undertaking the initiatives in developing regions, such as the African continent unencumbered by the colonial past unlike the European historical past of 'civilizing missions' (Gallarotti 2016). The grouping frequently having similar voting patterns on particular international issues also excelled in agenda setting which is one of the most significant tools of soft power. The BRICS created an attractive image that can pull many states which are perceived as exploited to follow its ideology and foreign policies which can be demonstrated through a great number of various states that applied to the membership of the grouping, such as Algeria, Argentina, Egypt, Bahrain, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. In addition, many other states expressed interest in joining the BRICS, such as Nigeria, Sudan, Uruguay, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Thailand, and so on. Whereas the BRICS' soft power is not influential in the rich world of dominantly Western states, it gains popularity in the developing world (Stuenkel 2016). It is a fact that developing nations represent the larger proportion of the global population thus outnumbering developed nations which stand at the cornerstone of the current world governance and presenting an increasing source of influence. However, it is noteworthy to mention that many scholars state that the BRICS are implicated in hypocrisy and double standards using the language of 'south-south' solidarity which can undermine its credibility as representatives of the Global South. The declarations of the grouping regarding the illegitimacy and inadmissibility of the interference into domestic affairs of other states and, especially, the military interventions do not coincide with the expansionist regional politics of China and the war in Ukraine waged by Russia. Moreover, the fine line between the opposition to the external interference and mutual respect towards regional spheres of influence is not clear which substantially undermines the BRICS' credibility as a soft power. The grouping, in order to successfully further exert its soft power influence, shall thus follow its proclaimed principles and ideology more consistently and continue the initiatives among its target audience which is mostly the developing emerging nations. In addition, the BRICS states' performance in the realization of the soft



power policies is highly unequal, for instance only Russia and China are able to financially invest on a systematic basis in the initiatives of language instruction, academic exchange and other components of cultural diplomacy (Stuenkel 2016). It will be highly difficult to counter the wide diffusion and influence of the Western news networks that advance the point of view and agenda of the Western world, such as the British BBC for example, and the attempts of the BRICS member-states to establish their own that target the international audience lag far behind (Stuenkel 2016).

### 3. The soft power influence of the European Union and the BRICS in Africa

#### 3.1 Africa as a global actor

##### 3.1.1. Africa as a developing region

Africa is the second largest and second-most populated continent with a peculiar historical past and an uneasy current path to economic development and due political representation on a world arena. Despite the fact that Africa possesses rich natural resources, such as natural gas, oil, uranium, copper, gold, and diamond, it is also the most underdeveloped continent in the world. As the UN indicate, Africa owns “30 per cent of the world’s mineral reserves, eight per cent of the world’s natural Gas and 12 per cent of the world’s oil reserves, 40 percent of the world’s gold and up to 90 percent of its chromium and platinum, 65 per cent of the world’s arable land and ten percent of the planet’s internal renewable fresh water source” (UN Environment Programme). Nevertheless, the continent is frequently subject to political instability, corruption, weakness of public institutions, civil unrest, violent conflicts, famine, extreme poverty, drought, and epidemic diseases. This leads to a particular dependence on humanitarian aid from abroad, especially from the most developed regions, such as Europe. The continent of 1.3 billion people and collective GDP of approximately \$3tr has some of the lowest GDP per capita worldwide due to high population growth and general underdevelopment and poor governance falling behind the rest of the world in traditional performance measurements (Brosig 2021). As the World Bank good governance index demonstrates, the African indicators remain far lower than the international levels of governance and it (Brosig 2021). Another peculiarity of the continent is that its trade is for the most part external, leaving the portion of intracontinental trade rather low. Perhaps the most fundamental reason of such underdevelopment of Africa is its colonial legacy and the consequent extraction of its resources by the then great powers which were mostly European. The so-called Scramble of Africa partitioned the continent in the spheres of influence, the colonies, of the principal European states. Such long-standing colonization and parasitic exploitation of local natural resources for their sake of capitalist enrichment had a calamitous impact and long-terms effect on the pace of development of African states. The present effect of the colonialism might be the fact that the African states are some of the largest exporters of raw materials, however, lacking manufactured goods made of that materials and profit from them (Brosig 2021). As a result, Africa has a rather limited role and agency in international governance amidst much more powerful global actors having a reputation of being malfunctional and incompetent domestically. Nonetheless, Africa, albeit sluggish, experienced some progress having the average life expectancy increased, violent revolts less recurrent, and middle class rising.

### 3.1.2. The diversity of the African continent

It is important to note that it is not accurate to generalize the whole African continent since it is home to 54 different countries which are rather diverse in their nature. Being divided according to several cleavages, Africa frequently experiences conflicts based on ethnicity, religion, and language. The African states vary from culture to economic growth, for instance, South Africa is the most urbanized country, whereas Ethiopia is the least urbanized one. According to the World Bank data, Western and Central Africa which includes 22 states is characterized by accelerated urbanization, young population, rich resources and export commodities, such as oil in Gabon, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, cocoa in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and cotton in Benin and Burkina Faso (World Bank 2023). It is expected to witness economic growth of the so-called WAEMU states which consist of Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte D'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo, while poor economic results of the so-called CEMAC countries, such as Cameroon, Chad, the Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and the Republic of Congo (World Bank 2023). Meanwhile, some drawbacks that the region faces are persistent gaps in health and education, conflicts, population increase, food insecurity and detrimental effects of climate change (World Bank 2023). As for close engagement within the region, the Western and Central African states cooperate under one of the most preeminent African regional intergovernmental organizations, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) comprising Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo, which was created predominantly in an economic domain but spilled over other areas, such as security. The Eastern and Southern Africa counts nearly 60% of the population of the continent and contains 26 diverse states, according to the World Bank statistics (World Bank 2023). The region's GDP is roughly \$1,917,904 million having South Africa as its biggest economy, although being a dual economy with high level of inequality (World Bank 2023). Many countries within this region are large producers of mined cobalt (the Democratic Republic of Congo) and crude oil (Angola) and exporters of commodities, including coffee (Ethiopia and Uganda) and tea (Kenya) and of precious metals and minerals, such as gold and diamonds (South Africa) and platinum (Zimbabwe) (World Bank 2023). Like Western and Central Africa, this region is characterized by highly youthful population as well. The recent pandemic and the outbreak of the war in Ukraine severely affected the economic situation in the region, in particular, worsened food insecurity, soaring commodity prices and aggravated excessive debt, on top of the worst drought in experienced the last 40 year (World Bank 2023). The states are regionally integrated in the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADC) comprising Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South

Africa, United Republic Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe which covers a wide range of domains, including trade and security and defense, as well as activities in political and socio-economic area. Alongside SADC, there also established the East African Cooperation (EAC) including Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, with its headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania which encompasses the areas of trade cooperation, governance of regional affairs, environmental concerns, and peace and security.

### 3.1.3. The regional integration in Africa

Concerning the integration and closer collaboration of the whole continent, African leaders formed the Organization of African Unity which was later transformed into the African Union (AU), the biggest and most significant intergovernmental organization in Africa, striving for the Pan-African approach in collectively solving the African matters and obtaining stronger agency of the continent in global politics. Seeking greater independence and emancipation, the AU was designed for 'African solutions for Africans problems' (Williams 2011). Marking a new era in African diplomacy, the organization guaranteed African states a collective platform from which to both manage intra-regional issues and act internationally (Brown and Harman 2013). The AU concluded a large number of bilateral partnership agreements with China, Japan, Russia, Turkey, France, India, Korea, and the USA frequently having the form of Africa + meetings at summit level, as well as being frequently invited as a guest in multilateral negotiations with major states making the African agency visible in international politics (Brosig 2021). It is important to mention that the AU remains funded largely by external donors. Despite the increasing significance of the AU, the African states still find it difficult to reach a common position. Generally, the African agency can be most visible in such international organizations, such as the UN, WTO and various IFOs regarding which African states expressed concerns, in particular, their legitimacy and relevance in the Post-Second World War and Cold War world echoing the emerging powers narrative (Brown and Harman 2013). It was possible to see a proactive stance African states took in post-Seattle Doha 'Development' Round in the WTO enhancing their influence on a global arena (Brown and Harman 2013). South African membership in the BRICS grouping marks an international representation alongside with other major rising players, such as India, Brazil, Russia, and China, and although the leadership of South Africa is contested in the continent, it nevertheless improves the African agency on a global arena, alongside with the membership in the G20. As for currently a pressing issue of climate change, African states take an active position on this matter too often expressing the same line of reasoning as the EU. Many important actors attempt to exercise influence in Africa. In fact, the most eminent major international actors, such as the EU and the BRICS states, have their initiatives and strategies in Africa, exerting

influence on the region. Chinese influence on Africa is characterized by a large-scale, not ideologically-oriented investment which overtook the US and the EU combined, Confucian institution-building in Africa in tradition of soft power and 'soft infrastructure' construction, such as hospitals and schools for instance. Africa is a significant part of the wide-ranging and far-reaching Chinese project *One Belt One Road Initiative* (OBOR) which aspires to integrate Asia, Africa and Europe and restore the Chinese global engagements and investments advancing its geopolitical interest. Russia also has a growing interest in the region being militarily involved in some conflictual areas and delivering large arms. In contrast, the EU strategy in Africa encompasses more policies on climate change and sustainability, democratic and human rights transformation, deterrence policies on migration and development of support programs. The fact that Africa owns a large variety of rich natural resources, the African population which is quite young is estimated to compose the quarter of the world population and an enhanced collective engagement of 54 states in international politics makes the continent a strategic area.

### 3.2 The soft power influence of the European Union in Africa

#### 3.2.1. The history of the EU-Africa cooperation

Among the EU's development initiatives, the EU-Africa cooperation relationship is one of the most prominent ones. Dating back to the *Treaty of Rome* (1957), the relation between the EU and Africa started with purely aid and trade and then enlarged to a broad variety of initiatives in the spheres of climate change, peace and security, migration, good governance, poverty eradication, combatting terrorism, environmental protection, hunger elimination, and so on. The EU-Africa development relations is based on four broad stands of the EU's external action, such as the long-standing relation with its member states former colonies, the *Euro-Mediterranean partnership* which includes the Northern African states, the EU ad hoc policies for post-apartheid South Africa, and the present Africa-EU strategic partnership (Babarinde 2019). Shortly after the newly obtained independence by a majority of the African states, the then EEC formed a formal agreement with the 18 African ex-colonies, known as the *Association of Seventeen African States and Madagascar* (ASSM) which was largely Francophone, that was called the *Yaoundé Convention* (1963) being further renewed to *Yaoundé II*. The then EEC agenda was to a great extent shaped by France, thus the main focus was on the former French colonies in Africa and their developmental process. The proclaimed principles and features which steered the convention were the liberalization of trade, developmental aid in form of loans and grants, principle of non-discrimination and reciprocity. In essence, the agreement aspired to promote "an increase of trade between the Associated States and the Member States, strengthening their economic relations and the economic independence of the Associated States" (Yaoundé Convention 1971, art. 1). The basis of this convention then transformed into the *Lomé Convention* (1975) following the accession of the UK, Denmark, and Ireland and their colonization legacy, and it included a much larger number of the African states, notably, 71 African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries known as ACP, marking closer North-South collaboration. The basic arrangement was, as previously, free access to the then EEC markets, devoid of quotas and duties. By having a broad access to the prominent markets, the African states aimed to boost their economies, while being protective of their sovereignty and regional affairs. However, the *Lomé Convention* made a first attempt to explicitly connect the areas of development with a clause on human rights since, as was stated, it is "a basic factor of real development" (Lomé Convention, art. 5; Babarinde 2019). Whereas the Yaoundé and Lomé Conventions were concluded according to the same premise, the subsequent *Cotonou Agreement* (2000), in continuing the EU-ACP development cooperation, constituted much more ambitious goals and larger framework of partnership. It comprised several development aspects, including a trade framework which apart from the trade conditions established before, also encompassed the gradual integration of the ACP economies in international economy

and consistency with such global economic international organizations as the WTO, then development initiatives related to food and water insecurity and extreme poverty, merit- and performance-based financial support, and finally a fully-fledged political cooperation in from of human rights, peacebuilding, and democracy clauses (Babarinde 2000). It is important to note that at the time with the global triumph of economic liberalism promoted predominantly by the US and the EU the IFOs, such as the IMF and the WB passed the infamous structural adjustment program (SAP) targeting the African states which were criticized by them as being one-size-fits-all (Babarinde 2000). Approximately at the same time China began to establish thorough economic links with the African countries, in particular, the Chinese exports to Africa considerably increased, and China gave the African partners unconditional loans. In the same manner as for the Sub-Saharan Africa, the cooperation relationship between the EU and North Africa was also institutionalized via development agreements, generalized as Maghreb Cooperation Agreements, such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) in 1995, also called as the Barcelona Process, also envisaged the liberalization of trade, and, consequently, the association agreements with Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and Algeria, finishing with the *European Neighborhood Policy* (ENP) in 2004 (Babarinde 2000).

### 3.2.2. The Joint Africa-EU Strategy

Currently, the most extensive and comprehensive institutional relationship enjoyed by the EU and the African states is the *Joint Africa-EU Strategy* (JAES) concluded between the EU and the AU in 2007. This strategy partnership eventually replaced the 2005 EU-Africa Strategy which was established in the name of the realization of the *Millennium Development Goals* in Africa with the help by the EU. Importantly, the 2005 cooperation was characterized as “an unbalanced donor-recipient relationship” (Martinelli 2011, p. 4). Instead, the JAES, laying down a long-term framework of mutual cooperation between the EU and the AU, is based on equal participation and representation ensuring that Africa is not simply a passive recipient of financial aid but an active participant of their own affairs reflecting the AU principle of ‘African solutions for African problems’. Reminiscent of the colonial past, the African nations seek for their own autonomous agency in international dialogue, and therefore the modern institutional relationship of the AU and the EU guarantees the equal footing in the processes of negotiations and decision-making. The bilateral agreement presumes the conduct of summits and adoption of declarations and action plans as a result. The First Action Plan adopted after the Second Summit in Lisbon (2007) held within the framework of the JAES stated that

“Africa and Europe are bound together by history, culture, geography, a common future, as well as by a community of values: the respect for human rights, freedom, equality, solidarity, justice, the rule of law and democracy as enshrined in the relevant international

agreements and in the constitutive texts of our respective Unions” (Joint Africa-EU Strategy Action Plan 2007, 1.1.1).

Moreover, the declaration announced the shared vision of the EU and its African counterparts, specifically, it stated that

“the partnership will be based on a Euro-African consensus on values, common interests and common strategic objectives. This partnership should strive to bridge the development divide between Africa and Europe through the strengthening of economic cooperation and the promotion of sustainable development in both continents, living side by side in peace, security, prosperity, solidarity and human dignity” (Joint Africa-EU Strategy, 2.4).

These jointly identified priorities indicate the African states, at least in principle, are willing to make commitments in the sphere of the jointly identified priorities outlined in the JAES, thus aspiring to the values and principles which are largely represented and promoted by the EU in its exercise of soft power. The main eight areas covered by the JAES are peace and security; democratic governance and human rights; trade, regional integration and infrastructure; millennium development goals; energy; climate change; migration, mobility and employment; science, information society and space. During the 3<sup>rd</sup> EU-AU Summit in Libya in 2010 the JAES was further renewed and the second Action Plan had been adopted. In particular, it encompassed four main objectives, such as enhancement of the Africa-EU political partnership, promotion of peace, security, democratic governance and human rights, basic freedoms and gender equality, sustainable economic development, including industrialization, regional and continental integration, fulfilment of all the Millennium Development Goals in all African countries by 2015, engaging in effective multilateralism, and developing a people-centered partnership. The implementation of the initiatives is funded via the pertinent EU budgetary instruments, notably, the European Development Aid, the European Neighborhood Policy Instrument, and the Development Cooperation Instrument. In promoting the domain of democratic governance and human rights, the second Action Plan encompasses four aims which are support the implementation of the African Governance Architecture (AGA), coordinated efforts with the aim of building a strategic dialogue and partnership on DGHR issues between the two continents, enhance cooperation between Africa and the EU in the area of cultural goods, strengthen synergies with other thematic partnerships and in particular with the partnership on peace and security (Martinelli 2011). Concerning the Africa-EU collaboration in the sphere of cultural goods, there was an agreement that the African states would participate in the management of the African cultural legacy whose large portion is in the museums and cultural institutions in Europe which indicates the debunking of the colonial legacy by the EU increasing its credibility. The AGA is a political and institutional framework run mainly by the AU Commission with a basic objective to strengthen governance mechanisms and optimize coordination and performance, being also represented by other several



institutions, such as the Pan-African Parliament, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Economic, Social and Cultural Council, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and others (Martinelli 2011). The AGA has a particular governance agenda which comprises, inter alia, the African Charter on Democracy, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the OAU/AU Declaration on Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa, the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Martinelli 2011). These concrete efforts to institutionalize the proclaimed values and policies and related initiatives to implement them and to guarantee the safeguard of their enforcement and compliance points to aspiration of the AU member-states to the EU normative agenda of democratic rule, basic rights and freedoms and rule of law they find attractive. Specifically, the APRM oversees the practice of self-evaluation tracking the level of progress in the continent, and the EU provided €2 million for its secretariat (Martinelli 2011). The democratic governance and human rights partnership is further supported and strengthened by the so-called *Africa-EU Platform for Dialogue* which offers open, equal and exhaustive dialogue focused on all matters related to the achievement of democratic governance and human rights, for instance, fight against corruption, election organization and observation, prevention of ill-treatment and torture, promotion of international justice, gender equality, abolition of death penalty, fight against terrorism, drugs and organized crime, including trafficking of human beings, and so on (First Action Plan 2007). Via this "Africa-EU civil society dialogue" the AU and the EU member-states are able to jointly tackle the corresponding issues, and the EU has this open space for an effective assistance to the African states in carrying out the necessary policies to implement the principles and measures in realizing which the EU is considered as a world benchmark (First Action Plan 2007, p. 11). Despite the slow rate of progress, there are several successful advancements, for instance the roundtable on business accountability arranged by the African forum in Brussels and the Friedrich Neumann Stiftung to promote the EU model of economic governance and impugn the Chinese pattern characterized by a disregard of the role played by the civil society and parliaments (Martinelli 2011). In addition, the AU observers of elections had an opportunity to be trained in the EU Election Monitoring Missions and to have a practical experience of monitoring election in Sweden and the European Parliament (Martinelli 2011). The principles and standards proclaimed, the initiatives launched, and the actions taken within the JAES as a result of the close Africa (AU)-EU partnership are all in fashion of the core values of the EU, and all enable to the African nations to approximate the EU *modus operandi* demonstrating the success of the EU soft power. However, there is also a wide criticism associated with the mode the

partnership was carried out and incoherency with the announced guiding principles and concrete objectives to an extent that some scholars argue that the JAES has failed in the eyes of the public. One of the most eloquent pretensions is incoherency between the announced ‘people-centered approach’ on paper and top-down approach lacking a participation of civil society in practice. In particular, apart from the fundamental goal of the JAES to operate within the ‘people-centered approach’, more concrete actions were undertaken, such as the Africa-EU Civil Society Intercontinental Dialogue Forum held in Cairo in 2010. The conference took place with the strong participation of the EU Commission and the AU Commission and produced the final communiqué which stated a primary objective of enhancing the inclusion of civil society in all the initiatives of the JAES. The various representatives of the civil society organization from both African and European sides were invited to attend this forum. Nevertheless, the progress in this regard was rather sluggish, and the level of participation of civil society organization of two continents remained limited. The two partners did not succeed in establishing the definite procedure settling the civil society involvement. A further issue is the discrepancy between the approaches between the EU NGOs and the African NGOs since the former do not have a formal obligation to eventually provide precise results, while the latter has a more structured procedure. Moreover, the deficiency of democratic rule in the African continent makes the African NGOs’ work rather challenging. Over time, the NGOs’ perception of the various undertakings within the framework of the JAES, such as dialogue forums, and the JAES in general grew increasingly distrustful and skeptical. Particularly, the dissatisfaction by the civil society organization was connected to the fact that even if the EU seemingly sought advice and contribution of such organizations, it did not include their input in the consequent formal policy formulation. Thus, the EU failed to provide the ‘people-centered approach’ within the framework of the JAES partnership with the AU as was announced as one of the most significant objectives in the two Action Plans and the dialogue forums. Given that the bottom-up approach is among the most fundamental elements of the democratic models, the EU demonstrated the incoherency with its values and lowered its efficiency and credibility as a soft power.

### 3.2.3. The Union for the Mediterranean

The EU as a world norm-promoter and soft power provided an approach putting people at center within the framework of the ENP, in particular, the *Union for the Mediterranean* (UfM) through which the EU exerts its soft power influence in the Northern Africa. The ENP, a broad foreign policy instrument of cooperation with the proximate neighbors addressing the areas of socio-economic development, good governance, and security, is divided into the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean blocs. The Southern Mediterranean region consists of 10 partner states, including

Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and others, promoting the EU position of a liberal democratic soft power. The UfM dealing with the Southern bloc supplements the wider ENP agreement by focusing solely on this region. Setting the key objectives which are human development, regional stability and integration, the UfM launched a vast number of development projects in various domains, such as civil and social affairs and economic progress. Via these projects the EU directly involved the citizens of the partner states of the UfM effectively providing the bottom-up approach. Some of the accomplished initiatives are *EDILE: Economic Development through Inclusive and Local Empowerment* and *WOMED: The Next Generation of Leaders* via which the EU promoted economic and women's rights. The *EDILE* project had a goal of improving the quality of investment undertakings and their local effects. As part of the project, the EU contributed financial aid to the local companies in the partner countries of the UfM, including many states in North Africa. The *WOMED* project encompassed the educational program for a selected group of women from the partner states of the UfM and a visit to a key site of the EU politics, Brussels. Therefore, in the context of the UfM, the EU carried out comprehensive projects which directly targeted and engaged the citizens of the partner countries, a large portion of which belong to the African continent, and promoted its fundamental principles alongside with contributing economic assistance.

#### 3.2.4. The strong and weak suits of the EU's soft power influence in Africa

Generally, the EU enjoys a large portion of influence and a wide set of powerful tools to successfully back up its soft power impact in Africa. What Nye called a 'smart power', it is indeed efficient to balance material interests with normative values and principles and 'intangible resources' in general, and, in fact, all successful soft powers are also strong in the 'hard power' resources. In addition to being the largest African trade partner, the EU is also one of the largest donors of the developmental aid in Africa being responsible for more than 50% of all assistance contributed to the continent (Floyd 2019). For instance, in 2016 the EU and its Member States accounted for €21 billion of the financial assistance which comprises, inter alia, the *EU Pan-African Programme* of €845 million, €592 million for the *African Peace Facility*, and €43 million for the *African Union Support Programme* (AUSP III) (Floyd 2019). Moreover, the EU provided technical support to the AU Commission to overall bolster the fulfilment of the JAES (Floyd 2019). Another strong tool in the EU arsenal is its successful historical experience of the regional integration among a large number of various sovereign states. The African states which strive for a closer continental integration and a collective agency in international relations can draw valuable lessons from a highly profound level of integration achieved by the EU Member States. What is more, the economy of the African continent is highlighted by the fact that the intra-state economy inside the continent is rather low,

whereas the external trade is much higher. It would be highly advantageous for the African states to enhance their internal trade dynamics boosting their rate of economic, social, and political development. The EU has an important historical experience in unification and harmonization of the market and a successful outcome in this regard. The EU can, therefore, use its soft power instruments in order to aid in the area of regional integration and cooperate with the African nations and institutions to accelerate this process. As Akum and Tull rightly noted, already a significant amount of the African intelligentsia received an education in the West, thereby also building social and political connections and networks which ultimately contributes to the dissemination of values and ideas (Akum and Tull 2023). The AU institutions already mimic the EU institutional to a large extent, in particular, the Pan-African Parliament reflects the European Parliament, the Assembly of Heads of States and Governments and the EC Council, and the African Court of Justice and the European Court of Justice (Schmidt 2012). Overall, the EU enjoys a comprehensive network of highly institutionalized initiatives, both at the level of the EU and AU states and institutions and of direct interaction with the citizens of the African states. It is one of the biggest providers of financial aid for the developmental objectives in Africa and, in general, enjoys a great influence in terms of economic development. However, there is also a significant portion of downsides of the relationship between the EU and the African nations which undermine the soft power of the former. The large economic power of the EU is also seen as detrimental by the African states in some cases. Specifically, the *Economic Partnership Agreements* (EPAs) trade policy is not seen as equally beneficial to Africa, and prompt market liberalization is seen as more advantageous for the EU countries rather than the African ones which are worried about the impact on their local industries and state revenues (Floyd 2019). Furthermore, the initiatives and policies of the EU towards Africa are frequently seen as unilateral, as happened in 2018 with the ambitious *Africa–Europe Alliance* announced by the then President of the EU Commission Jean-Claude Juncker which covered the investments, grants, and loans to Africa, enhancement of trade relations, such as free trade agreements, and so on (Floyd 2019). The important aspect of this initiative was that it was declared before carrying out dialogue and consultation with the African states and stakeholders which should be an indispensable part of every bilateral partnership. Such unilateralism is seen in a broader picture of the tendency of the EU to universalize its own experience and impose it on others which is often criticized, including its African counterparts. This aspect is also reflected in the conditionalities within cooperation agreements the EU concludes with the third states. While rising powers, especially, China, strictly stick to the philosophy of non-interference, the EU approach underlines the inclusion of the clauses on democracy, human rights, and others, which can be perceived as excessive. The EU is, on the whole, threatened by emerging powers in gaining the attractiveness and legitimacy of the African nations.

The appeal of the principle of non-interference which is one of the tenets of the BRICS was demonstrated during the vote of the UN General Assembly Resolution ES-11/1 in 2022 condemning the Russian invasion in Ukraine put the Western diplomats in shock since nearly half of the African countries declined to support the resolution (Akum and Tull 2023). Another drawback in the EU relation towards Africa is the migration policy concerning the African citizens. During the peak of the 2015 migration crisis it became evident that the EU migration policy sharply contravenes its core identity with the principles of respect for human rights and social solidarity that it promotes. Such hypocrisy became even more blatant during the recent crisis of the Ukrainian refugees who were welcomed on the territory of the EU Member States, whereas the borders are decisively shut down for the African and Middle Eastern asylum-seekers and would-be refugees. Such a policy formulation clearly damages the EU reputation and coherency with its proclaimed values. All this leads to the fact that the leading position of the EU in the African affairs does not go unchallenged and indicates that the EU necessitates key changes in its approach, and, for instance, start to genuinely ask and prioritize the questions “in whose interest?” or “with what objectives?” when it comes to the external agreements with the developing states.

### 3.3 The soft power influence of the BRICS in Africa

#### 3.3.1. The BRICS-Africa relationship overview

As the new effective global actors, the BRICS members, that are China, Brazil, India, Russia, and South Africa, in exerting influence on a world political environment, actively undertake the strategies towards developing regions, including Africa which is the continent with the highest number of the least developed states. The BRICS states, especially China, all strengthened their presence in the continent in various areas, such as trade, investments, development aid, infrastructure, security, and others. Correspondingly, the grouping, having a well-pronounced rhetoric and a wide range of both tangible and intangible tools, also increased its position as an effective soft power among the African nations. It can be argued that Africa is the most crucial focus of the grouping concerning the developmental goals due to the South Africa's accession in 2010 with a strong support of China. The particular interest of the grouping is also connected to a number of benefits the process of investment in Africa provides. As previously mentioned, Africa is a region which possesses rich natural resources which principally appeals to China, Brazil, and India allowing them to satisfy their own economic needs. The economic performance of the African states is improving, for instance, six out of 10 fastest growing economies worldwide in the period from 2001 to 2010 were African (Ernst and Young 2011). The African population which is quite youthful currently counts 1.3 billion, while is predicted to reach 2.75 billion by 2060, in addition to an annual output of \$16 trillion (Luke 2023). Furthermore, the African nations, although being different among themselves, aspire to gain more recognition in international politics and, especially following the establishment of the AU, are collectively pursuing a growing political agency reaching some progress. In exercising influence over the African continent, the BRICS members pursue a complex objective: firstly, the states address their own needs, thereafter they promote sustainable development of the region and finally they demonstrate the declared 'South-South' cooperation in practice, thereby enhancing their credibility and reputation (Deych 2015). Overall, the principles the BRICS stands for and externally promotes as a soft power are unconstrained state sovereignty, sovereign equality, opposition against unilateral military interventions which are often conducted by the Western powers, more representative and multipolar rule-based global order. In order to fully effectively advance their soft power agenda, the BRIC states firstly constructed the strong economic ties with the help of more tangible instruments.

#### 3.3.2. The BRICS' tangible resources basis

It is noteworthy to state that China is the most influential player among the BRICS members in Africa, due to its economic potency and a wide network of partnerships and strategies it established with the African counterparts in the recent years, such as the abovementioned OBOR and the *Forum*

on *China–Africa Cooperation* (FOCAC) which is a formal and institutionalized cooperation platform on a high level. The tangible resources, predominantly economic ones, that the BRICS states own and use in their policy realization in Africa strongly support their standing as an effective soft power. The mutual trade between the BRICS members and the African states has considerably grown over time. The *United Nations Economic Commission for Africa* (UNECA) stated that trade of the BRICS states with the African nations substantially grew since the beginning of the century, specifically, from \$22 billion in 2000 to \$340 billion in 2012 (UNECA 2013). Among the BRICS members China plays a leading role and is one of the largest African trading partners having surpassed the US in 2009 and being projected to overcome the EU by 2030 which are the traditional economic partners of Africa. India, as an importer of natural resources, also enjoys extensive trade relations with the African states, as does Brazil. Following the acceptance of South African membership in the grouping, its trade with other African nations increased (Deych 2015). The only exception is Russia which has a low turnover of trade with Africa, compared to other BRICS members. The BRICS has also become an important player in development assistance in Africa with China as a leader in this area. For instance, China is devoted to prevention of deadly viruses in the Western Africa, and in 2014 President Xi Jinping proclaimed a large aid package of \$81.7 million which would help to fight against Ebola (Shan 2014). India has also improved its aid to Africa, and approximately 60% of the credits offered by the Export-Import Bank of India were granted to Africa (Deych 2015). Brazil is not lagging behind its BRICS counterparts being an important donor to Africa, specifically the *Brazilian Agency of Cooperation* devoted more than half of its total technical cooperation projects to the African agriculture sector (Deych 2015). Since the fall of apartheid regime South Africa highlighted the South-South cooperation and was, for example, one of the starters of the *New Partnership of Africa's Development* (NEPAD), which was ratified by the AU having the goals of, for instance, reduction of poverty. The BRICS also has a broad display of companies in the African markets. Indian companies largely concern the African natural resources, for example, the *Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited*. China has over 2500 companies in various domains, for instance the *China Railway Construction Corporation* indicating that china is actively involved in infrastructure and especially road construction in Africa connecting various parts of the continent (Deych 2015).

### 3.3.3. The BRICS' soft power influence in Africa

Underdeveloped infrastructure is the Achilles' heel of the African path to development since due to this issue the continent loses two percentage points of its annual GDP growth (Deych 2015). The BRICS states were notable for their focus on this deficit, and concentrated on this problem more

than the Western states (Deych 2015). The BRICS' own established bank, NDB, whose main goals are infrastructure and sustainable development in BRICS states and other emerging powers, conduct a large variety of projects in the areas of transport infrastructure, energy sufficiency, water security, environmental protection, social infrastructure, and COVID-19 emergency assistance. In the end of 2022, the *Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) Sustainable Infrastructure Project* with the loan of \$100 million was approved. Within the framework of this initiative, the NDP granted the loan for a finance of infrastructure projects in South Africa in sectors, such as renewable energy, digital infrastructure, and social infrastructure, specifically, affordable housing, student accommodation, and private healthcare facilities (NDB 2023). The importance of the question of African infrastructure development was illustrated in the eThekweni Declaration of 2013 following the fifth BRICS summit, proclaiming the aims "to stimulate infrastructure investment on the basis of mutual benefit to support industrial development, job-creation, skills development, food and nutrition security and poverty eradication and sustainable development in Africa" (eThekweni Declaration 2013). The NDB, claiming to offer more advantageous loan conditions to developing states than Western consolidated powers, is a strong tool of attraction since it symbolizes the 'south-south' cooperation, particularly, the institutionalized form of this rhetoric, and firmly complements the grouping's declarations of being advocates for the underdeveloped and developing world regions, or simply the Global South. The basic idea is that cooperation and help are granted among the developing states within the Global South, rather than unilaterally from the powerful states of the Global North whose assistance is often noted as paternalistic. The more comprehensive and holistic definition of 'South-South' cooperation was elaborated by the UNDP highlighting that the two are not necessarily antagonistic:

"a process whereby two or more developing countries pursue their individual and/or shared national capacity development objectives through exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how, and through regional and interregional collective actions, including partnerships involving governments, regional organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector, for their individual and/or mutual benefit within and across regions. South-South cooperation is not a substitute for, but rather a complement to, North-South cooperation" (UNDP 2012).

This is also shown in the flexibility of the BRICS approach which does not refuse to continue to cooperate with the Western powers, while criticizing their rhetoric and advancing own agenda of the reformed multilateral global governance. Notably, in the Beijing Declaration of 2011 the BRICS health ministers articulated the grouping narrative underlining the significance of an exchange of efficient technologies and high-quality medicine between the grouping members, also providing them to other developing countries (Deych 2015). All the projects and partnership the BRICS undertakes with the African nations are under the auspices of this proclaimed 'South-South' cooperation, and,



having an abundant basis of tangible resources, the BRICS states appeared to have gained success as a soft power in Africa as well. First and foremost, the full-fledged membership of South Africa carries a symbolic significance for a number of reasons: the African nations claim to endure underrepresentation and paternalistic attitudes in international affairs for a long time, South Africa enjoys special ties with the EU based on historical past and modern policies, for instance, it is the only African nation in G20, and South Africa can be seen as a representative of Sub-Saharan Africa where China, being a fulcrum of the BRICS, indisputably holds a dominant position. Following the South African accession in 2010, the member-state hosted two summits and is about to hold its third one in the summer of 2023. South African leadership is founded on the ‘Africa first’ approach and the ‘African agenda’ rhetoric which is largely the former President Mbeki’s rule during which the South African role was critical in the settlement of the aforementioned NEPAD, the APRM, the African Renaissance Fund, and others (Dube 2013). As Dube rightly stated, South Africa is quite vocal concerning the African agenda emphasizing particularly the infrastructure investment in the overall continental development (Dube 2013). Via these summits which are predominantly concentrated on the African continent and its process of development, South Africa push forward its regional policies and claims to promote agenda of the whole continent. During the 2013 Durban Summit which also coincided with the statement on the establishment of the BRICS-LED Development Bank, the BRICS members chose the overarching theme “BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Development, Integration, and Industrialization” and stated that

“Within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), we support African countries in their industrialization process through stimulating foreign direct investment, knowledge exchange, capacity-building and diversification of imports from Africa. We acknowledge that infrastructure development in Africa is important and recognize the strides made by the African Union to identify and address the continent’s infrastructure challenges” (eThekweni Declaration 2013).

The member-states also mentioned the marginal role of developing regions within global economy which are highly impacted by the actions of the powerful players, in particular, the grouping “noted policy actions in Europe, the US, and Japan aimed at reducing tail-risks in the world economy. Some of these actions produce negative spillover effects on other economies of the world” (eThekweni Declaration 2013). The grouping has also resorted to the narrative of the reform of the IFOs, notably, of the IMF, in order to “strengthen the voice and representation of the poorest members of the IMF, including Sub-Saharan Africa” (eThekweni Declaration 2013). Moreover, the declaration called for the reform of the UN in favor of more representation of Africa, such as

A comprehensive reform of the UN, including its Security Council, [...] China and Russia reiterate the importance they attach to the status of Brazil, India, and South Africa in

international affairs and support their aspiration to play a greater role in the UN. [...] [The BRICS] acknowledge the central role of the African Union (AU) and its Peace and Security Council in conflict resolution in Africa. We call upon the UNSC to enhance cooperation with the African Union, and its Peace and Security Council..." (eThekweni Declaration 2013).

Significantly, the BRICS commented on the Mali War underlining the principle of inviolability of state sovereignty and territorial integrity the grouping stands for, in particular, the member-states affirmed that they "commend the efforts of the AU, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and Mali aimed at restoring sovereignty and territorial integrity of Mali" (eThekweni Declaration 2013). Since South Africa is a formally equal member of the BRICS on a par with China, India, Brazil, and Russia, the African nations are able to directly address the issues of the continent through this membership and conducted summits, specifically, South Africa is able to connect the prominent African actors to much more global and potent scope of the BRICS. In fact, at the BRICS-Africa Leaders' Retreat conducted after the Summit and under the theme "Unlocking Africa's potential: BRICS and Africa Cooperation on Infrastructure", South Africa invited key actors of continental institutions, such as the African Leaders representing the eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the NEPAD, the Chairperson of the AU, and the Chairperson of the AU Commission (Dube 2013). This dialogue offered an opportunity for the BRICS and important African actors to formally discuss the proclaimed objectives and programs on the African development progress on an equal footing. The next summit in the name of the African cooperation was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2018 on the symbolic date of the centenary of the birth of Nelson Mandela, which was called "BRICS in Africa: Collaboration for Inclusive Growth and Shared Prosperity in the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution". It also welcomed the BRICS-Africa Outreach, a formal meeting between the BRICS states and the African heads of states and of governments for the promotion of the AU Agenda 2063 through BRICS' mechanisms, and second BRICS Plus Cooperation with Emerging Markets and Developing Countries (EMDCs). Importantly, enhancing the grouping soft power, the member-states "commended the organization of the 3<sup>rd</sup> BRICS Film Festival and recognize the need to further deepen cooperation in this field. [The BRICS] acknowledges South Africa's proposal regarding a draft BRICS Treaty on Co-Production of Films to further promote cooperation in this sphere and to showcase the diversity of BRICS cultures", introduced "the Think Tank Council, the Academic Forum, the Civil BRICS Forum, the Young Diplomats Forum, the Youth Summit, and the Young Scientists Forum", directly engaging the citizens of the member-states, especially the young parts of the populations, and welcomed the hosting of the 3<sup>rd</sup> BRICS Games by South Africa alongside with the attempts made to establish the BRICS Sports Council (Johannesburg Declaration 2018). Finally, South Africa is about to hold its third summit in the summer of 2023 under the theme "BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually

Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism”, and the current President Cyril Ramaphosa stated that the government

“wants to use this opportunity to advance the interests of our continent, and we will therefore through the BRICS summit be having an outreach process or moment, where we will invite other African countries to come and be part of the BRICS because we do want BRICS in whatever BRICS does to focus on helping to develop our continent” (Lissovolik 2023).

All in all, it is possible to say that the BRICS established a solid foundation of the formal cooperation and partnership with the African continent on the matter of the African development and promotion of greater African representation, which was partially realized with the South African membership, on a global arena within the broad framework of the narrative on the reform of global governance which has to be more inclusive, representative, and multilateral. Individually, in terms of the effective exercise of soft power, the BRICS members have also undertaken a number of initiatives in Africa. During the FOCAC conference in 2012, China, the strongest soft power among the BRICS members, announced that its development aid to Africa would be shifted from ‘hard’ infrastructure assistance to a ‘soft’ one underscoring people-to-people exchange, human resources, education, and collaborative research (Zhang 2013). Moreover, China made advances in the area of telecommunication development in Africa, specifically, the Chinese Huawei concluded contracts with Nigeria, Kenya, and Zimbabwe for supply of mobile links (Deych 2015). As for development of human capital, there was a proposition by China to set up the African Talents Programme to train professionals in different areas, then China regularly grants university scholarships to African students, and creates Confucius Institutions in which the Africans have the possibility to learn language, culture, and history (Deych 2015). The Indian big programs include the Pan-Africa Network for granting Indian educational and medical assistance through satellite technology and the Indian Technical and Economic Training Programme which envisages various educational and training programs (Deych 2015). Brazil, having vast experience in tropical medicine, made substantial progress in healthcare cooperation with Africa having exchanged its experience to its African partners and invested in health facilities there. Russia contributes financial aid to Africa for developmental objectives predominantly through international organizations and is particularly active in the spheres of food security, healthcare, fight against deadly viruses, and education, for instance it granted 750 university scholarships for the African nationals in 2013 (Vasilyev and Korendyasov 2014). Although South African aspiration for a regional leadership is contested by various fast-growing African states, it has a significant soft power arsenal, encompassing a long-standing tradition of ethical leadership of Nelson Mandela, its membership in BRICS and G20 and generally significant foreign policy standing in international politics compared to other African states, and the general

increasing pre-eminence in the region with its ability of combination of hard and soft instruments of power. South Africa is one of the leading powers in the development sector of Africa having been one of the founders of the NEPAD and establishing DBSA aspiring to enhance African sustainable development. On the whole, soft power became one of the most important tools of the overall strategy of the grouping in exerting influence on developing regions of the world, especially the African continent. According to the Afrobarometer's data, the Africans hold the positive opinion of Chinese aid and influence on the continent being the second preferred development model after the US, while South Africa is the third one, and 35% of the respondents welcome the influence of Russia (Afrobarometer 2021). Multipolarity in international politics is considered to be favorable to Africa's growing demands of its independent agency, self-assertion and advancement of its strategic interests. As Akum and Tull rightly put it, "engagement with rising powers enables African states to exercise influence by leveraging historical socio-economic and cultural empathy and commonalities, with support from private sector industries, in order to gain a comparative advantage" (Akum and Tull 2023). The strategic agenda of Africa coincides well with the proclaimed principles and objectives of the BRICS and the grouping's emphasis on the sustainable development of Africa and reform of global governance, therefore, it demonstrates that the BRICS' active exercise of soft power, its persuasion, attraction and agenda-setting, finds consensus and approval among the African nations in their global politics aspiration. Nevertheless, it is important to note that in comparison with highly institutionalized EU-Africa relationship, the BRICS lacks this significant feature in its partnership with the African states, largely due to the deficit of formality within the grouping itself which is its biggest weakness and a reason for considering it as dysfunctional by many scholars. Due to this 'dysfunctionality' of the grouping, previously described, it will be complicated for the BRICS to compete with such long-standing traditional partners of Africa, such as the EU. Another criticism is connected to the growing concerns of the 'debt trap' of Africa by China which provides more long-term loans rather than grants. The Afrobarometer statistics confirm this anxiety, specifically, a majority of the African respondents stated that their governments borrowed too much money from China. (Afrobarometer 2021). The statistics also demonstrated that 69% of the respondents said that English was the most important international language for young people to learn, and that more younger than older Africans favor the U.S. model (Afrobarometer 2021). While the BRICS lacks necessary force to wholly counter such powerful actor as the EU in the exercise of soft power influence in Africa, the grouping succeed to effectively verbalize the strong demand of an overwhelming amount of rising powers which long for the merited representation on a global arena and planted the seeds of this narrative with the game-changing institutions, such as the NDB.

## Conclusion

The EU and the BRICS are very distinct international actors, starting with its internal mechanisms and ending with their vision of how the global governance should operate. There are many ways of exerting influence on other actors, including the exercise of soft power, a concept whose importance was underlined somewhat only recently. Both the EU and the BRICS have their own political agenda and rhetoric of soft power, via which the two actors promote their values and principles, which are quite distinct compared to each other. In practically exercising their soft power, the EU and the BRICS exert the influence on the developing regions, including Africa. The paper investigates whether the BRICS is able to overcome the EU in terms of exerting soft power in the African content. Firstly, the paper examines the foreign policy agenda of the two international actors and their relationship in the first chapter. The European Union, emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War and disastrous consequences of the war, is a *sui generis* supranational union composed of 27 European states and one of the most preeminent global actors. The European leaders' realization of the need to ensure peace in the continent led to, firstly, close economic cooperation and then to a fully economic and political union with supranational institutions. In the process of formation what eventually becomes the European Union, the core EU values and principles were established as a cornerstone of its political identity and conjunction itself. Nowadays, the EU is portrayed as one of the most effective soft powers worldwide, and its soft power agenda and external interaction with other actors are built upon that key values and principles. The first formal formulation of the EU core principles was in the *Declaration of European Identity* (1973), then in the development cooperation with the former African colonies, the *Yaoundé convention* (1963), the *Copenhagen Criteria* to fulfil for the candidates to obtain the EU membership, the *Petersberg Declaration* (1992), and finally in the *Treaty on European Union* (TEU) (1992). All these formal expressions embody the EU basic values, including democratic rule, rule of law, respect for human rights, social justice, and protection of minorities provided the principles of representative democracy. The global order which was set up following the Second World War encompasses this set of principles since the architects of the current world order are the consolidated Western powers, such as the US and the present EU. The BRICS grouping, composed of China, Russia, South Africa, India, and Brazil, all being emerging powers, proceeded from this premise articulating the alternative conception of world order which counters the Liberal International Order. Criticizing the Western policies, for example the US *War on Terror* and the Bush Doctrine and the status quo IFOs, the emerging powers who the BRICS deems to represent found the voice in such international circumstances as the Doha round agreement at the WTO during which they stood up to the consolidated Western powers. The 2008 international economic crisis showed the crucial role the rising states and their economies play in international

relations and served as a trigger for the official formation of the BRICS. The BRICS' internal mechanism embodies the annual summits hosted by each state in sequence and the following declarations and action plans. The fundamental principles the BRICS promotes as a grouping are non-interference into domestic affairs, inviolability of state sovereignty and territorial integrity, 'South-South' cooperation, and multipolar and rule-based world order. The BRICS backed up this set of principles with the concrete exercise of soft power by including South African as the fifth formal member and by establishing the NDB giving the grouping a truly global dimension and influence. The relationship between the EU and the BRICS is not characterized as strictly antagonistic since the former is a non-formal and a recent formation. Secondly, the paper explores the theory of soft power and the rhetoric and exercise of the EU and BRICS' soft powers. The theory of soft power is predominantly formulated by the American scholar Joseph Nye who built its concept on the US as a case study of its hegemony and soft power. Contrary to the military might and other tangible resources which are used to coerce the others, soft power is a power of attraction which utilizes intangible resources of political culture, ideas and policies. The successful soft power is this a state which succeeds at exporting attractive and legitimate political culture and narrative so that other states follow them. It is also crucial to proceed beyond Nye's theory which is based on the US experience this being quite limited, and explore each case in particular, as was done with Ding's account on the China's long-standing historical legacy of soft power. Manners identified nine core principles of the EU which form the basis of its soft power narrative, such as sustainable peace, freedom, democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, equality, social solidarity, sustainable development, and good governance. The EU, identified as normative and civilian power, practically exercises its soft power through the global efforts of abolition of death penalty, regulation of global markets, the cooperation and association agreements it concludes with the third states with the conditionalities in a form of clauses of democracy and human rights, for instance the ENP, and recent development of relationship with Ukraine amidst the war actions. The BRICS' set of values differs encompassing the aforementioned principles attempting to reform the present world order and make it more multilateral, inclusive, and just. The BRICS' articulated narrative is backed up by its political conduct in the international organizations, for example, China and Russia, two veto members of the UN Security Council, did not support the resolution on Syria in the name of protection of its sovereignty and of the principle of non-interference. It is also supported by the establishment of their own IFO, the NDB, and the settlement of the broader formal dialogues that include a larger number of rising powers, specifically, the BRICS Outreach/BRICS+ initiatives. The paper then finally examines the EU's and BRICS' exercise of their soft power in Africa. Africa, being a diverse continent made of 54 states, is a developing region with the strong potential of development. As an

international actor, the African nations established the AU in order to achieve greater autonomous political agency and settling the Pan-African approach. The formal partnership between the EU and the African states began with the Yaoundé Convention and continued with the series of other formal development agreements. Currently, the most all-encompassing formal cooperation is the EU-AU JAES via which the EU effectively exerts its soft power influence. The EU core values and principles are included in the JAES action plans and the institutions, including the *African Governance Architecture* (AGA), the *Pan-African Parliament*, the *African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights*, the *Economic, Social and Cultural Council*, the *African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights*, the *African Peer Review Mechanism* (APRM), largely reflecting the EU political identity. The cooperation based on the values of democracy and human rights is deepened by the Africa-EU Platform for Dialogue via which the African specialists were trained in the *EU Election Monitoring Missions* and received an experience of monitoring elections in the European Parliament. The EU also directly interacts with the African citizens through the projects, such as the *WOMED* and the *EDILE*, within the framework of the UfM. In its turn, the BRICS engages with its African counterparts on the basis of the 'South-South' narrative which prioritizes the cooperation among the developing powers within the Global South, rather than a unilateral aid from the more powerful state from the Global North. One of the main focuses of the BRICS is the Africa's underdeveloped infrastructure, providing financial assistance through the NDB projects, such as the *Sustainable Infrastructure Project* according to which the aid was allocated to the DBSA. The South African formal membership also provides effective soft power influence since it holds the symbolic significance of the due representation of the African nation on a global scene and since South Africa puts forwards the African agenda through the summits it hosts. According to the Afrobarometer's statistics, the Africans have a positive opinion on the Chinese aid and influence in the continent. Having examined the soft power narrative and its exercise by the EU and the BRICS, the paper concludes that whereas the BRICS as a grouping itself is not capable of overcoming the EU in the effective exercising of soft power, the status quo influence of the EU in terms of soft power is menaced by increasingly strong demand of the rising powers which is articulated by the BRICS inevitably leading to the transformation of the world order in favor of more multilateral one that does not encompass the Western values articulated by the EU.

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## Synthesis in Italian

Nell'emergente sistema multilaterale di governance globale, le dinamiche delle relazioni internazionali si sono evolute e importanti attori statali internazionali optano per la creazione di alleanze formali per perseguire i propri interessi in modo più efficace. La congiunzione internazionale più illustre è rappresentata dall'Unione Europea, unione sovranazionale fortemente interdipendente creata nella tradizione del regionalismo, che comprende 27 Stati europei e dichiara i principi della pace e della libertà come sua pietra angolare. Un'altra alleanza degna di nota è una coalizione ad alte ambizioni relativamente nuova chiamata BRICS che comprende cinque economie mondiali emergenti e segna la realizzazione delle aspirazioni di lunga data dei rappresentanti non occidentali per ottenere un ordine globale multipolare più inclusivo. Dirigendosi verso gli stessi territori di influenza, ad esempio il Sud del mondo, i due raggruppamenti di stati presentano insieme di valori diversi e perseguono obiettivi diversi, tentando di conseguenza di attualizzare le loro visioni distinte su come sarà il sistema internazionale in futuro. Tra una serie di modi per esercitare influenza sulle regioni in via di sviluppo, l'UE e i BRICS sembrano divergere principalmente in termini di soft power. Essendo una delle regioni in evoluzione più ambiziose, l'Africa condivide un ricco passato coloniale comune con l'Europa, attualmente ha una rappresentanza ufficiale di fronte al Sudafrica all'interno dei BRICS ed è destinata a una più stretta interconnessione da entrambe le alleanze. Questo documento, in primo luogo, esamina la formazione e il meccanismo della politica estera e dell'azione esterna dell'UE e l'istituzione del gruppo BRICS, insieme all'agenda dei suoi affari esterni. Quindi il documento esamina brevemente la relazione bilaterale dei due attori e valuta i loro punti di forza e le relative debolezze. Successivamente, esplora il soft power di ciascuna UE e dei BRICS elaborati e promossi esternamente. Infine, il documento studia l'esercizio del soft power dell'UE e dei BRICS nel continente africano che costituisce un caso di studio e cerca di rispondere alla domanda se i BRICS, un attore internazionale effettivo relativamente nuovo, sia in grado di superare l'UE, un partner africano tradizionale, in termini di esercizio di soft power nei contenuti africani. Il documento conclude che mentre i BRICS come gruppo stesso non sono in grado di superare l'UE nell'esercitare un'influenza di soft power nel contesto africano, i poteri consolidati, come l'UE, sono sempre più minacciati da una forte domanda di stati in via di sviluppo che in gran parte coincide con gli obiettivi proclamati e l'agenda articolata dei BRICS, e le sue richieste della necessità di riformare la governance globale trasformano inevitabilmente la politica globale.