

# CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF BRICS EXPANSION TOWARDS THE BLACK SEA REGION

## DESAFIOS E PERSPECTIVAS DA EXPANSÃO DO BRICS PARA A REGIÃO DO MAR NEGRO

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### Abstract

Under the conditions of globalization, the economies of countries have become excessively interdependent. Small, open-economy, developing countries, including Georgia, are much more dependent on the foreign economic policies pursued by states with large economies. One of the effective tools for reducing this dependence is the participation of countries with small, developing economies in such economic integrations. The study aims to identify the challenges expected in the field of BRICS expansion towards the Black Sea region. The research used methods of collecting, grouping, and analyzing materials, based on which the problems and prospects of Georgia's membership in BRICS+ integration were determined. The research identified the potential risks of Georgia's membership in BRICS, the avoidance of which will contribute to increasing the benefits that Georgia will receive from joining this integration, as well as increasing the potential for

### Resumo

*Nas condições da globalização, as economias dos países tornaram-se excessivamente interdependentes. Pequenos países em desenvolvimento, com economias abertas, incluindo a Geórgia, são muito mais dependentes das políticas econômicas externas adotadas por Estados com grandes economias. Uma das ferramentas eficazes para reduzir essa dependência é a participação de países com economias pequenas em desenvolvimentos nessas integrações econômicas. O estudo visa identificar os desafios esperados no campo da expansão do BRICS em direção à região do Mar Negro. A pesquisa utilizou métodos de coleta, agrupamento e análise de materiais, com base nos quais foram determinados os problemas e as perspectivas da adesão da Geórgia ao BRICS+. A pesquisa identificou os riscos potenciais da adesão da Geórgia ao BRICS, cuja prevenção contribuirá para aumentar os benefícios que a Geórgia receberá ao aderir a essa integração,*



equal trade and economic cooperation with this group.

**Keywords:** Integration Union, BRICS. BRICS+. Challenges of Joining Integration. Prospects for Cooperation with Integration. Costs and Benefits of Joining Integration.

*bem como para aumentar o potencial de igualdade comercial e de cooperação econômica com esse grupo.*

**Palavras-chave:** União da Integração. BRICS. BRICS+. Desafios da Adesão à Integração. Perspectivas de Cooperação com a Integração. Custos e Benefícios da Adesão à Integração.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

BRICS is an association of five countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) with the most dynamically growing GDP volume, built on the principles of equality, which, in our opinion, will become the so-called "building material" for building the future global economy. At the XIV BRICS Summit held in 2022, BRICS was represented in an expanded composition, which was called "BRICS+". The BRICS countries were united by a common vision of peace, security, cooperation, and development. The purpose of the establishment and functioning of BRICS is to make a significant contribution to the development of humanity, to the creation of an equal and just world.

A conditional currency fund (BRICS Reserve Fund) has been created within the framework of BRICS, which will have functions similar to the IMF: if necessary, the fund will provide financial assistance to BRICS member countries that have problems with the balance of payments. The fund's capital amounts to \$ 100 billion. The contribution of each country will correspond to the size of its economy. The BRICS central banks will retain their shares in the composition of gold and foreign exchange reserves, and the allocation of financial assistance to BRICS member countries in need will be carried out as follows: each country that decides to apply for assistance must justify its application by the fact that it has problems due to pressure on foreign exchange markets or a sharp depreciation of its national currency. It is worth noting that the BRICS countries reserve the right not to participate in the formation of the fund.

In 2023, it was decided to admit new members to BRICS, namely: the United Arab Emirates, Argentina, Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, whose membership began in 2024. In 2024, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates joined the BRICS union. In the same year, the 16th BRICS Summit was held in Kazan, Russian

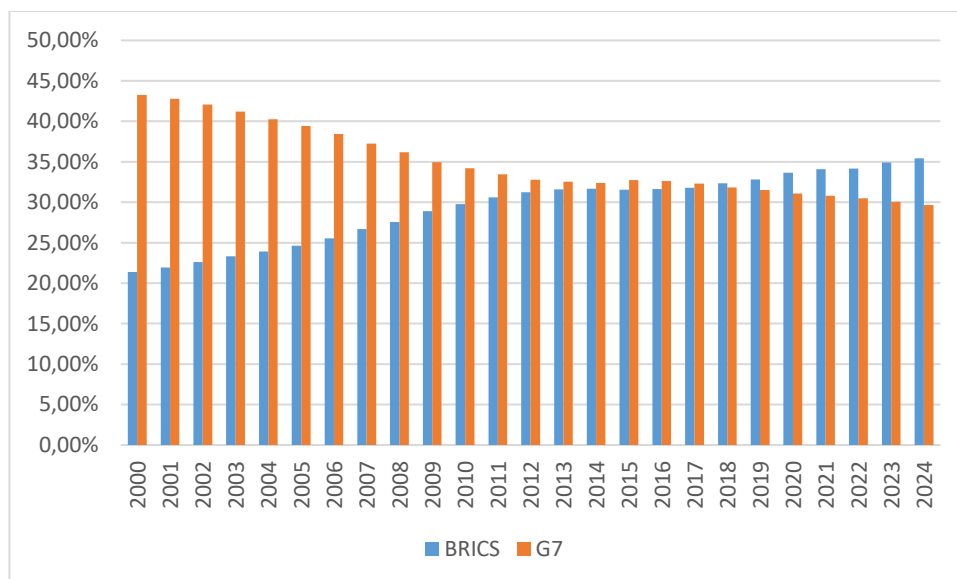
Federation, where the agenda included the reform of the World Trade Organization and the UN Security Council, the formation of a new banking and settlement system - a new currency independent of the US dollar, and a unified transport and logistics platform.

BRICS and the bank created on its basis are considered an alternative to the “Big Seven”, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. For this reason, the European Union is watching the expansion of BRICS with great concern, because there is a danger that BRICS, with its gigantic economy and ambitions, will attack the existing world economic order with new forces. In the coming years, BRICS will become a trading bloc representing the “global majority”.

BRICS aims to create a strong political and economic alternative to the European Union. BRICS, in terms of economic size, has surpassed the “Big Seven” (Fig. 1).

**Figure 1.**

*BRICS, in terms of economic size, has surpassed the “Big Seven”*



The economic success of the BRICS is largely determined by China and India. Currently, the BRICS are considering the introduction of a common currency to compete with the dominance of the US dollar. “Dedollarization”, that is, the weakening of the dollar’s position, to some extent also means the weakening of American influence. In addition, unlike the World Bank and the IMF, the BRICS bank does not impose political conditions on the issuance of loans. China is in favor of expanding the BRICS, which

wants to gain more leverage in its confrontation with the United States. The BRICS is a union of very different countries, and they have different views on many critical issues.

The Georgian economy is sensitive to both international and regional shocks within the Black Sea. Therefore, making the right strategic choice in terms of its foreign economic policy and participation in economic integration is extremely important to preserve Georgia's economic and cultural identity (Abuselidze, 2019). In this regard, in terms of further development and expansion of Georgia, it is promising to find a golden mean between the European Union and the BRICS. There is a prospect of expanding these two economic integrations to the countries of the Black Sea region.

Georgia's historical choice of foreign economic policy was to join the European Union, but the Russia-Ukraine war, the withdrawal of Great Britain from the European Union, and the increased bureaucracy of European integration partially weakened the attractiveness of joining the European Union and disrupted its institutional system.

The study aims to identify the challenges and prospects, losses and benefits of BRICS expansion towards the Black Sea region, and to identify the threats that our country may face if Georgia joins this union. To achieve this goal, statistical methods of information collection, grouping, and analysis were used. A correct assessment of the potential capabilities of BRICS will contribute to the identification and implementation of the potential for cooperation with BRICS in the new reality of Georgia's open economy (against the backdrop of ongoing hostilities in the Black Sea region).

The research hypothesizes that if the Georgian government pursues a constructive, correct, and purposeful foreign economic policy, then, under the conditions of Georgia's effective cooperation with BRICS, it will be possible to use the resource potential within this association to Georgia's benefit.

The methodological basis of the work is the research conducted by Georgian and foreign economists in the field of economic integration. Our research is based on the methods of data collection, grouping, and analysis. The paper studies the specifics of Georgia's cooperation with BRICS. Georgian and foreign scientists have devoted many works to the study of the development potential of the BRICS union, but their research is mainly oriented towards assessing only the development and resource potential of this integration. The drawback of their research is that they do not study the prospects of its expansion in the direction of the Black Sea region in the wake of the BRICS potential.

The economic identity of Georgia, as a small country, depends significantly on its participation in economic integration as a protective mechanism against global shocks, on the proper management of these processes, and on the use of current developments within the framework of international economic integration to Georgia's advantage. They argue that EU membership is a sufficient condition for ensuring the sustainability of Georgia's economy, but the "overheating" of this regional integration has made this hypothesis unreliable.

The potential usefulness of the proposed research lies in clarifying what role the expansion of BRICS to the Black Sea will play in the balance of world power and the formation of a new world economic order, what benefits it will have, and what threats Georgia will face in the event of BRICS expansion to the Black Sea.

## **2 REVIEW AND UNDERSTANDING OF RELEVANT LITERATURE**

Let's consider the opinions of some researchers about the resource and economic development potential of the BRICS union.

In the work "Trade Policy Directions in Response to New Challenges of Global Markets", the author notes that "Despite the decline in world trade in 2008-2016, the imports and exports of the BRICS countries were growing. Their share in world exports is about 1/3. Their trade ties have deepened both among themselves and with other growing markets and developing countries. At the Johannesburg summit in 2018, these countries expressed their readiness to participate in the further development of the multilateral framework of the World Trade Organization and to pay special attention to the problems of developing countries. In this regard, the role of the BRICS countries in the transformation of global trade rules, their trade policy, influence on the WTO, policy coordination, and cooperation of the BRICS countries are relevant. The BRICS countries have sufficient power to question existing trade rules." (Jamagidze 2023; Ji *et al.* 2021, 2023; Abuselidze 2025).

Guobadia Osaseri & Ifuero Osad Osamwony published a study, „Impact of stock market development on economic growth in BRICS“. The study examines the Stock Market development and economic growth in BRICS. Quarterly time series data for the period 1994Q1 to 2015Q4 were sourced from the World Bank Indicator. The Panel Least Squares based on the fixed effect estimation was employed to determine how stock

market development impacts the economic growth of BRICS. Diagnostics tests were conducted to ascertain the robustness and stability of the regression results. The findings reveal that stock market development exerts a significant impact on economic growth. The study revealed that there is a positive correlation between stock market development indicators and BRICS's economic growth. The study recommends that the weaknesses of each of the BRICS member countries should be taken as a policy focus, and strategies necessary to strengthen them should be swiftly applied by the governments.“ (Osaseri, Osamwonyi, 2019).

In his study, OD Awolusi, „Economic Growth and Socioeconomic Sustainability in BRICS Countries: A Vector Error Correction Modeling Approach, “states that „A major problem to the BRICS goal of achieving sustainable economic growth for members is the increasing level of socioeconomic inequality in the bloc. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to understand the influence of economic growth on socio-economic sustainability in the BRICS countries, using a yearly dataset from 1990 to 2019. A multivariate co-integration technique by Johansen and Juselius, and the Granger causality test were used to establish the relationships. Findings confirmed co-integration and short-run causal relationships. The most interesting results were the negative influence of economic growth on socio-economic inequality, tacit support for the resource curse hypothesis. The paper concluded that a common policy option was not possible and that for the block to pursue its economic prosperity goals without compromising individual countries' needs for socioeconomic sustainability, varied policy options were inevitable. The policy implications and recommendations are straightforward: the radical legal basis for the transition from natural resource export, as well as sweeping regulation for the sustainable usage of natural resources protection, strict penalties on violations of environment-related laws and policies to enhance general country-wide support. In addition, there may be an urgent need to define the active role of NGOs and other independent institutions in promoting socioeconomic equality (sustainability) practices and concepts at both local and national levels, enhanced social programs, market development, Integration of existing policies, and creation of societal culture. Consequently, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study has investigated comprehensively (along with multiple determinants) the sustainability of growth policy options within BRICS with an aim to proposing socioeconomic sustainability and growth policy options.“ (Awolusi, 2021).

In her study, Abigail Stiglingh-Van Wyk, „Financial development and economic growth in BRICS and G-7 countries: a comparative analysis, “states that „The relationship between financial development and economic growth is an important issue for both developed and developing countries through which the extent of economic growth and the sophistication of the country’s financial markets are linked. The research studies the existence of a relationship between financial development and economic growth using a sample of BRICS and G-7 countries from 1996 to 2013. The study objective was to conduct a comparative analysis of the relationship between financial development and economic growth within BRICS and G-7 countries. A panel data analysis was used to analyse secondary data from 5 BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and G-7 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, and the United States). Variables used include economic growth, stock market capitalisation, total investment growth, interest rates, and population growth. This study found that real interest rates and total investment are positively related to economic growth in both BRICS and G-7; while other variables, such as stock market size, do play a significant role in explaining economic growth in both BRICS and G-7 countries, and other variables, such as population growth. Findings of this study suggest there are no major differences between developed and developing countries in their financial development and economic growth. This study may assist BRICS and G-7 countries to improve their economic growth structure and financial development systems over time. “ (Stiglingh, 2015).

The analysis of the research conducted so far on the integration and resource potential of BRICS shows that if the synergy (integration) effect of the resource potential of BRICS is properly managed, it is possible to strengthen the role of the countries included in this economic union throughout the world. According to them, the trade policy of BRICS has a significant impact on international markets and the trade policies of other countries. Cooperation with this integration will create favorable conditions for Georgia to increase its competitiveness in the global market.

Our view in this paper, unlike other scholars, is that BRICS+ is studied from the perspective of expansion towards the Black Sea. The BRICS economic union envisages the prospect of expanding the “middle corridor” towards the Black Sea to increase the volume of transit of Asian cargo flows to Europe and vice versa. The study of the challenges and prospects of BRICS expansion towards the Black Sea, to which the article

is devoted, is to discover new opportunities for Georgia in terms of increasing the stability of its open, small economy, so that Georgia can fully reveal and realize its potential in the field of economic cooperation with its trading partners.

### **3 METHODOLOGIES**

The methodological basis of the work is the scientific-intellectual research prepared by Georgian and foreign scientists in the field of BRICS economic integration. The work is built based on the study of existing theoretical approaches and ideas in the direction of the development of economic integration. The research of the work uses statistical research methods that correspond to the direction of research in the field of regional integration cooperation.

### **4 RESULTS and DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 Possibilities of solving the financial trilemma in modern Georgian business**

As a small country, Georgia is facing the threat of losing economic security and stability. Joining economic integrations provides the prerequisites for increasing the sustainability of its economy. The threat of economic instability is caused by many internal and external factors, such as global developments, the country's size, competitiveness, and competitive positions in the world market, the level of economic development, the presence of foreign exchange reserves, etc. "Security and stability are prerequisites for stable economic development, successful integration into global economic systems, and sustainable economic growth in the Black Sea region, including Georgia. BRICS is one of the real instruments for ensuring security and stability in the Black Sea region compared to other regional associations in the world (the European Union, BSEC, GUAM, etc.), taking into account the Russian factor." (Margvelashvili, 2019).

## **4.2 The role of BRICS in terms of Black Sea security**

The economic role of the countries of the Black Sea region and, accordingly, the interest of the world's leading countries and associations in them has increased even more. The coastal states of the Black Sea region, including Georgia, have been assigned a new geopolitical role. They have been given new opportunities and, at the same time, faced new challenges. Against this background, the BRICS association has also expressed its desire to balance power and expand integration in the Black Sea region.

BRICS can play a major role in enhancing security in the Black Sea region, which has not been given due attention so far. The increasing influence of the BRICS union on the countries of the Black Sea region has not been given due attention in Georgia either.

Georgia is taking its first formal steps towards a multi-vector foreign policy; China is activating its engagement policy in the South Caucasus, which has recently been discussed along with the Central Asian region, where China has had a foothold for many years. The Georgian government has signed several documents supporting China's foreign policy, but has not received clear recognition of its territorial integrity in return. China's perception of the sovereignty of post-Soviet states is based on Russia's, which requires caution in dealing with the economic giant.

The annexation of territories by other countries in the Black Sea region has established a new balance of power in international relations.

## **4.3 The role of the European Union in the Black Sea region**

The three Black Sea states - Georgia, Ukraine, and the Republic of Moldova - are on the path of European integration. The legal framework for this process has been defined by the "Association Agreements" with the European Union, which include the "Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement" (DCFTA). These agreements are concluded within the framework of the European Union's "Neighborhood Policy" and significantly contribute to the institutional improvement and economic development of these countries. This allows them to have access to the EU market without fees, taxes, and customs procedures. These documents, among other things, set various standards that these countries must achieve to further deepen their European integration process.

The European Commission is implementing a “Blue Economy Strategy” for the Black Sea region, which aims to promote joint efforts and coordination among the EU’s Black Sea littoral states. European integration provides sustainable security and stability, which is essential for the Black Sea region in such turbulent times. In view of the above, a renewed EU policy for the Black Sea region is needed, which will draw on the experience of the EU Strategy for the Mediterranean and ensure a higher level of EU engagement in the Black Sea region.

#### **4.4 The role of leading states in the security of the Black Sea region**

The United States is a strategic partner of Georgia. The United States supports Georgia’s integration into the global economy. The United States plays an important balancing role in enhancing security and stability in the Black Sea region.

The Republic of Turkey, given its strategic location, NATO membership, and military-economic capabilities, is an important regional player, and its contribution to the security of the Black Sea region is of paramount importance. It plays a major role in the fight against international terrorism and is an important partner country of the European Union in terms of managing migration flows. The security and stability of the Republic of Turkey, in addition to the Black Sea region, is also reflected in the Mediterranean region and the Middle East. Accordingly, the peace and stability of the aforementioned regions have a great impact on the security of the Black Sea region. The stability and security of the Black Sea region, in turn, are of crucial importance for the safe functioning of the existing transport corridors of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline. In addition, the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) and Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) projects should bring greater security to the Black Sea region as an energy transit corridor and, consequently, attract more investments and business initiatives to the region.

Georgia continues to cooperate with leading countries of the world and is gradually acquiring the role of a leading transit and economic hub in the Black Sea region (Abuselidze, 2021). Free trade agreements with the European Union, the People’s Republic of China, the Republic of Turkey, and most of the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States make Georgia an attractive place for attracting foreign investment, which creates a good basis for joining the BRICS union and reduces

the risk of conflict situations. Accordingly, over time, the Black Sea region will become increasingly important in terms of regional, international security, and economic prosperity. Georgia should continue to contribute to the security and stability of the Black Sea region, in accordance with a balanced and pragmatic approach. Nevertheless, in today's interdependent world, it is becoming increasingly difficult for a small and vulnerable country like Georgia to protect its legitimate interests without strong partners and allies. Accordingly, in our opinion, there is no alternative for Georgia to the peaceful resolution of conflicts with the active involvement of international and regional organizations, the annexation of temporarily occupied territories, and integration into BRICS, as a counterweight to the EU, in the event of artificially creating barriers in the process of accession to the EU. Therefore, in the event of artificial barriers on the path to integration with the EU, the expansion of BRICS towards the Black Sea will be the most adequate foreign economic strategy for the countries of this region (including Georgia) in response to the existing political, security, and economic challenges.

But at the same time, the issue of BRICS expansion towards the Black Sea region should be considered in a broader geopolitical context, since this expansion is accompanied by certain risks, threats, and challenges. There is a reasonable suspicion that the Georgian government is beginning to change the country's foreign policy course, and in this, it is being helped by those forces that are at the forefront of attempts to transform the current world economic order. These countries are China, Russia, and their partner satellites. To understand the processes taking place in Georgia, it is necessary to understand the fundamental changes in the current international environment and to see the country's domestic political processes in their context. It is also important, as a result of the analysis of the current processes, to see what threats such a change in the country's foreign policy course may bring to Georgian state institutions and society. Understanding these issues is doubly important for the pro-Western opposition political spectrum of Georgia, which must understand the external context of the domestic political situation.

#### **4.5 BRICS and the transformation of the international order**

“The global order strengthens the positions of the powerful states that lead it on the international stage. For example, the US has invested in the liberal international order, the creation of which it itself helped create. This order reflects American preferences and

spreads US influence. As long as the order provides sufficient benefits for the majority, the core states will try to protect it. For decades, under the leadership of the US, threats to this order were limited to a few odious states that did not have the power to defeat the existing system. Such countries include: North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Brazil, Indonesia, Venezuela, African countries, etc.” (Antadze, 2024).

On the one hand, it is difficult to imagine a configuration in which the United States and its allies would no longer be the dominant power, but on the other hand, history has shown us that the global order can change rapidly. For example, in the 1910s, the British Empire seemed to be an indefinitely sustainable Western hegemon. However, the next two world wars and a wave of decolonization changed the situation. Since then, the world order created by US dominance has consolidated and, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, has looked solid, although it has periodically been characterized by fluctuations and contradictory trends.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the resulting restructuring of interstate relations have created a new reality. The cornerstone of this fundamental transformation of the international economic order is a new group of states to which other countries dissatisfied with the existing order can turn their attention. This group of states is shaping an international system characterized by an increasingly organized and competitive order.

Historically, competing orders have fueled conflict, especially in geographically adjacent areas. Wars arise from specific conditions, such as territorial disputes, the need to protect national or allied interests, or threats to the existence of a regime, but for any of these conditions, the likelihood of war increases when opposing orders exist. Some scholars have found that periods characterized by a dominant single order - such as the European balance of power that prevailed in much of the 19th century or the post-Cold War era of U.S. dominance—were less prone to conflict than periods characterized by multiple orders, such as the multipolar period between the two world wars and the bipolar system of the Cold War.

The world has already received a warning about the instability that a new era of competing orders will bring to potential aggressors interested in normalizing alternative rules and less afraid of the threat of isolation. In such an environment, they may no longer be afraid of even more extensive and active actions. It is likely only a matter of time. Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is the first big signal of this. This was followed by Hamas’s attack on Israel and Israel’s large-scale military attacks on Gaza. Azerbaijan

established military control over Nagorno-Karabakh. Tensions will also increase between Serbia and Kosovo in 2023. An increase in the number of such uprisings from 2020 onwards will herald the formation of a new world order or the transformation of the existing one.

For many years, military coups seemed to be rare, partly because the authors of the action plan faced great external risks for violating the norms. Now the situation has changed. The overthrow of a government regime can disrupt relations with the West, but new regimes can find support in China and Russia. This trend is especially relevant for the African continent.

The deepening cooperation among the BRICS countries is fueled by their common opposition to a Western-dominated global order. And also by antagonism based on the belief that this system does not reflect their status or allow them the freedom of action they deserve. In addition, each country claims spheres of influence: China's "core interest," which extends to Taiwan and the South China Sea; Iran's "axis of resistance" of puppet, proxy groups that allow Iran to consolidate its positions in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen; North Korea's claim to the entire Korean Peninsula and Russia's "near abroad," which for it includes, at a minimum, those countries that were part of the historic "Soviet" empire. All four countries see the United States as the main obstacle to establishing control over their spheres of influence. Accordingly, their interests are common, and they want to reduce US influence in their regions of influence.

While the BRICS do not need a coherent plan for an alternative international order to disrupt the existing system, their shared opposition to the current order and their determination to make changes provide a basis for joint action. For example, the Israel-Hamas war and the threat that it could escalate into a larger war have stalled US efforts to completely shift US combat resources from the Middle East to the Black Sea region. The situation in the Middle East is largely tailored to Iranian interests. Iran sees an opportunity in the chaos to enhance its regime's status, weaken and diminish Israel, undermine US interests, and make the regional order more favorable to it.

Russia is working with Iran to build a new drone factory in Russia. North Korea has sent Russia ballistic missiles as Ukraine's supplies dwindle. China, for its part, has become Russia's most important lifeline. It has stepped up purchases of Russian oil and gas, bringing billions of dollars to the Russian treasury. China is also offering Russia other technologies needed for war production, from semiconductors and electronics to

radar, communications jamming equipment, and jet engine parts. Despite Western trade sanctions, Russia's imports of computer chips and their components have steadily risen to pre-war levels. More than half of these goods come from China.

With the support of BRICS, Russia's position on the battlefield has been strengthened, which undermines Western attempts to isolate Russia, primarily harms Ukraine. This cooperation is only the tip of the iceberg. There has been cooperation between the BRICS countries before, but the war in Ukraine has accelerated the deepening of economic, military, political, and technological ties between these countries. BRICS is increasingly identifying common interests, synchronizing rhetoric, and coordinating military and diplomatic activities. Their rapprochement is creating a new center of defiance of the existing order, which is fundamentally changing the geopolitical landscape. This group is not an exclusive bloc and, of course, not an alliance. It is a union of countries dissatisfied with the situation. They share a common goal of upending the established international principles, rules, and institutions that underpin the prevailing international system. When BRICS countries work together, their actions have an effect far greater than the sum of their individual efforts. Working together, they strengthen each other's military capabilities; weaken USA foreign policy instruments (including sanctions); and undermine the USA and its partner countries' ability to enforce global rules. The collective goal of the BRICS countries is to create an alternative to the current USA-dominated order.

In parallel with the consolidation of domestic political power, from 2007-2022, Russia began a consistent review of its geopolitical place. The result of this was the 2008 Russo-Georgian war and the subsequent annexation of Crimea. After that, the question arose of reviewing Russia's role in the international order and gaining and establishing a new, more influential place. Whether it was the concepts dictated by Russian "Eurasianism" or the development of the idea of the Russian world, one thing remained unchanged - there was a clear dissatisfaction with Russia's role and place in the new world order, which was formed by USA dominance. After achieving domestic political consolidation and economic stabilization, claims to the immediate neighboring territories and dissatisfaction with NATO expansion are clearly evident in Russia's strategy. As it turned out later, this issue was the main leitmotif of Russia's foreign policy negotiations.

Against the backdrop of the strengthening of the Russian Federation, significant contradictions have also emerged in the West over the past decade. The unity of NATO

and the European Union on many issues has collapsed. There is no unified position on the issues of NATO and EU enlargement. As a result of Brexit, Great Britain left the European Union. Against this background, Western political everyday life, burdened with migrant and energy issues, could not concentrate on the threats emanating from Russia. This was facilitated in every way by Russia's political support for active populist groups. As a result, Russia used the created geopolitical situation to realize its own interests. The annexation of Crimea failed to become a wake-up call for the West. In this reality, as a result of demonstrating the West's weakness, Russia made new demands on it. This was, in fact, a call for the formation of a new world economic order. The position of the BRICS countries is as follows: the international order based on liberal principles and values is coming to an end, and the world is once again becoming a zone of influence for regional and global powers.

As the SWOT analysis of the economic security of the Black Sea region shows, BRICS is not the only guarantor of the economic security of the countries of the Black Sea region. It is important to assess the impact that BRICS can have on the economic progress of the countries of the Black Sea region, including Georgia (in particular, in accelerating the growth rates of its foreign trade and gross domestic product). This is evidenced by comparing the growth rates of the gross domestic products of the BRICS member countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and the Republic of South Africa) with the growth rates of the gross domestic products of those non-member countries (Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) that are interested in joining the union (Table 1)

**Table 1.**

*Annual growth rates of real GDP (in percent)*

Years	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa	Turkey	Iran	Azerbaijan	Georgia
2019	1,22%	2,20%	3,87%	5,95%	0,26%	0,82%	-3,07%	2,48%	5,38%
2020	-3,28%	-2,65%	-5,78%	2,24%	-6,17%	1,86%	3,33%	-4,20%	-6,29%
2021	4,76%	5,87%	9,69%	8,45%	4,96%	11,44%	4,72%	5,62%	10,64%
2022	3,02%	-1,25%	6,99%	2,95%	1,91%	5,53%	3,78%	4,72%	10,96%
2023	2,91%	3,65%	8,15%	5,25%	0,70%	5,11%	5,05%	1,12%	7,47%
2024	3,04%	3,63%	7,02%	4,82%	1,05%	3,01%	3,67%	3,17%	7,55%
2025*	2,16%	1,35%	6,46%	4,48%	1,49%	2,70%	3,06%	2,53%	5,98%

Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG>

A comparative analysis of the GDP growth rates of BRICS member and non-member countries shows that, compared to 2019, in 2020, the GDP growth rates of both

member and non-member countries are characterized by a downward trend (negative), which is a result of the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and not the integration effect. In 2019, only Turkey and Iran maintained a GDP growth trend, which, in our opinion, was achieved in relation to Turkey by the resilience of its economy to external shocks, and in relation to Iran, as a result of the isolation of its economy. In 2021, compared to 2020, a sharp GDP growth trend (from 4.72% to 11.44%) was noticeable in both BRICS member and non-member countries. After 2021 (from 2022 to the second quarter of 2025 inclusive), the dynamics of GDP changes in both BRICS member and non-member countries are characterized by a more or less, mainly downward trend.

As a comparative analysis of the GDP growth rates of BRICS member countries and non-member countries interested in joining the bloc over the past six years (2019-2025) shows, the dynamics of their growth rates over the past six years have been characterized by the same trend, which indicates that the change in the GDP growth rates of BRICS member countries depends more on current events in the world economy than on the economic effect of the scale of integration, since, over the past six years, the same trends in GDP growth rates have also characterized non-member countries interested in joining this integration.

Thus, at the expense of gaining the scale effect from integration, to expand foreign trade, GDP, and generally accelerate the rates of economic growth, the membership of the countries of the Black Sea region, including Georgia, in the BRICS is, in our opinion, not promising from a purely economic point of view. Also, Membership in BRICS alone cannot guarantee the security of countries in the Black Sea region; joint security requires coordinated policies implemented by BRICS, the European Union, the USA, and Turkey.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the attempt to expand BRICS towards the Black Sea region is an expression of a significant transformation of the international economic order, primarily from the side of China and Russia, which forces the countries in our geographical area to choose between the West and the status of a satellite partner of China and Russia. This, in fact, implies a radical change in the foreign policy course of Georgia since its independence. In the event of maintaining the current policy of the Georgian government, Georgia's

historical choice (to return to the bosom of Western civilization) is facing a fundamental threat.

The attempt to expand BRICS towards the Black Sea region is today an important tool in the hands of Georgia, the use of which potentially creates an opportunity to put the development of the most important actors for ensuring the democratic process in the country - civil society and the media - into a new, strengthened framework with legal regulations. The new barriers artificially imposed by the EU on Georgia's path to joining European regional integration are pushing Georgia towards the establishment of an autocratic regime and a change in its foreign, pro-Western course. As a result, Georgia may find itself in the camp of those countries that oppose the current international order and encourage the formation of so-called "sovereign democracies". In this situation, small states, deprived of Western-type alliances and partners, will find it difficult to realize their own interests and will find themselves vulnerable.

At the same time, such a change in foreign policy would pose an existential threat to the physical existence of Georgia's civil, free society and the future of democratic processes in the country. All states that are in alliance with authoritarian countries have fundamental problems with civil society and individual freedoms. In such a situation, a new wave of politically motivated emigration will be expected in Georgia, this time affecting the country's most active, intellectual population. An Eastern-type autocratic regime will be established in the country.

As a result, Georgia will find itself isolated from its Western partners and will find itself face-to-face with Russia. The policy of non-recognition of the occupied regions will also be threatened. Such isolation will, over time, further increase Russia's direct influence on Georgia's foreign economic policy. It is worth noting that the outcome of the BRICS expansion towards the Black Sea region and the formation of a regional security architecture will largely depend on the outcome of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Presumably, the acceleration of the anti-Western processes in Georgia may be aimed at changing the country's foreign policy before this new reality is established.

Although Russia's role in the BRICS expansion towards the Black Sea region is not actively visible and Russia looks weaker in the region than before, its influence has been somewhat weakened due to the war with Ukraine; its influence in Armenia and Azerbaijan has also been reduced, and a significant part of the Russian Black Sea Fleet has been destroyed. Against this background, the West's positions in the Black Sea region

do not look strong either. Of course, there is still a significant pro-European social dynamic in Georgia and Armenia, but they are strongly competing with those political and economic forces that see the future of the South Caucasus in a completely different context.

Finally, today, Georgia and the future of its democratic development are at a crossroads, which is greatly influenced by the transformation of the international environment. A choice is being made between the Western democratic world and other, remaining countries. The question is also being resolved about where the border of Western civilization will pass in Eastern Europe or in Georgia. This question is still relevant and unanswered. Integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic space is a historical choice for Georgia, but the prospect of expanding BRICS towards the Black Sea region and Georgia's membership in this union has emerged as an alternative. It is precisely such a choice that is being made against the will of the Georgian population, when the government is orienting itself towards joining the BRICS union, which, due to the current system of the world economic order, is opposed to the West.

In addition, it is worth noting that the continuation of the anti-Western course poses significant threats to the stability and further strengthening of Georgia's state institutions. The material and intellectual assistance of the West, and in particular, the United States, makes a great contribution to the development of Georgia's national security institutions. Many programs are being implemented to restore/strengthen the defense capabilities and security of our country. The suspension of these programs will severely affect the stability of Georgia's state institutions.

At a time when pro-Western sentiments are so strong among the Georgian population, the government is taking a significant risk by radically changing the country's foreign policy course and can no longer take into account the choices of a large part of its own population. In such a case, to maintain power, it will be necessary to further increase pressure on socially and politically active subjects. The change in foreign priorities also threatens the stability of Georgia's financial institutions, which are closely linked to Western financial systems. In the event of the continuation of the anti-Western course, if financial flows are interrupted, within the framework of BRICS, dependence on Chinese capital will most likely increase, which carries significant risks for non-democratic countries, because in the event of failure to service the debts incurred, this will lead to the transfer of operational control over various infrastructure to China. For example, in 2017,

Sri Lanka handed over one of its ports to China for 99 years due to the failure to timely repay the obligations assumed by the country. Due to the reckless attitude of debtor governments towards foreign debts and the additional requirements imposed by China in contracts, countries are often forced to cooperate with Chinese companies with state guarantees, which increases the risk burden on these (debtor) countries themselves, and not on Chinese companies. This happened with Pakistan, Laos, and many other African countries.

China-related debts have become a serious challenge for many developing countries with small and open economies, which have accumulated significant debts in exchange for Chinese investments and are now struggling to repay them. Some countries have been forced to transfer strategic assets, such as ports, to China. The population of the BRICS countries is also concerned about the fact that work on infrastructure projects is mainly carried out by Chinese workers, who send their salaries back to their countries and do not spend them on increasing the purchasing power of the local population. This issue once again highlights some problems with the BRICS union.

Such challenges further increase the critical attitude towards BRICS and raise questions in many partner countries about the benefits to be gained from this union. Of course, these and similar issues cannot stop the process of transformation of the global order. The transformation of the international economic order is an inevitable process and, in turn, provides the prerequisites for the expansion of BRICS towards the Black Sea region. However, to use these opportunities as effectively as possible, it is important to democratically strengthen Georgia's internal political system and complete its integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic space, which will minimize the risks and threats that may arise for Georgia in the geopolitical context as a result of the transformation of the global order, including in relation to BRICS. The absence of a unified strategic approach from the West towards the Black Sea region, unfortunately, complicates this process even more.

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### **Authors' Contribution**

Both authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

### **Data availability**

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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