Fabiano Mielniczuk

Professor of International Relations at ESPM-Sul

Director at Audiplo

**The role of BRICS in Brazil's Foreign Policy:**

**an assessment on its limits and possibilities**

Brazil passed through unprecedented transformations during President Lula da Silva two terms in office (2003 - 2010). The country has reduced its carbon emissions significantly, the economic growth averaged 5% per year and redistributive policies alleviated poverty affecting around 30 million people. Moreover, Brazil has achieved a new level of engagement in international affairs. The country showed a more decisive commitment as a candidate of a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council - for the first time leading a Peacekeeping Operation in Haiti. After the world economic crisis of 2008, Brazil actively participated in the G20 and in the negotiations on the IMF and World Bank quota reformation. Even more boldly, the innovative stance of Lula's foreign policy was undoubtedly asserted in the first months of his presidency, when his Foreign Minister, Ambassador Celso Amorim, disengaged from the negotiations on the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and redirected Brazilian attention to emerging states in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Within this new scope of foreign policy, regional organizations like the UNASUL, the African Union, the Arabic League, among others, received special attention. Above the regional level, however, Brazil promoted alternative arrangements like the IBSA Forum (India, Brazil and South Africa) and later the BRICS grouping (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). This structure of compounded diplomatic layers facilitated Brazil's economic growth because: a) it opened new markets for Brazilian exports; b) the resulting commercial surpluses financed the increasing expenses in redistributive policies which, in turn, c) contributed to boost internal consumption and reinforced a favorable economic atmosphere for foreign direct investment. Without digging in the debate about the economic reasons that underpinned such an export-led economic development, the main argument of this paper is that, at the political level, BRICS was the cherry at the top of the diplomatic cake that enabled Brazil to enter this virtuous economic cycle. That is the reason why it came relatively late at Lula's presidency: it is a natural result of all other initiatives and was dependent on the model of economic development adopted during his government. Since 2011, however, the limits of this model became apparent and the incapacity of President Dilma Roussef to offer an economic alternative coincided with an inflection in Brazil's foreign policy towards its more traditional ties with the USA and Europe. In this context, institutionalizing BRICS is the only manner to keep the grouping a priority in the future of Brazilian Foreign Policy.