Russia’s 2020 chairmanship in BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as many other international processes this year have been significantly modified due to the situation with COVID-19. Although face-to-face talks have been put on hold due the pandemic, using modern technology, Russia with support of its partners has managed to carry out most of the planned activities and preserve the continuity of our cooperation.

BRICS and SCO have passed the COVID-19 “stress test” and reaffirmed the ability to respond flexibly to the changing international situation. Moreover, the pandemic proved highly relevant principles lying in the foundation of both formats – support for multilateralism and international law, inclusiveness and commitment to dialogue as well as respect for sovereign equality of states.

BRICS: multifaceted cooperation gathers pace

Today, the five countries account for 33 percent of global GDP or $47.5 trillion (in terms of their national currencies’ purchasing power parity). In 2019, BRICS surpassed the G7 in this respect, with a GDP of $42 trillion. The share in international trade of the five countries stood at 22 percent ($6.7 trillion) and mutual exports have grown by 45 percent over the past five years.

In BRICS, Russia succeeded in finalizing a number of practical agreements that will bring forward three priorities of its chairmanship:

- strengthening multilateral principles in global politics and promoting shared interests of the BRICS countries in international fora;
- developing cooperation in trade, economy and finance;
- fostering ties in the cultural and humanitarian spheres and strengthening people-to-people contacts.

This includes a set of documents devoted to trade and investment, encouraging small-, medium- and micro-businesses to participate in international trade, strengthening cooperation between banks. Our respective ministries have adopted a joint statement in support of the multilateral trading system and WTO
reform. We reject the methods of protectionism and unilateral sanctions, and adhere to building international trade on the basis of transparency, openness and inclusiveness.

The BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement is being strengthened. The five countries pay special attention to promoting deeper integration of the national payment systems, as well as creating cross-border payment infrastructure.

The New Development Bank (NDB) established by BRICS is successfully running 64 projects worth almost $21 billion, including $3 billion on the projects in Russia. This year NDB has launched a special credit line up to $10 billion for projects of post-pandemic recovery in BRICS countries. The Eurasian Regional Centre of the NDB will open in Russia in October.

BRICS Industry Ministers are working on strengthening cooperation on the New Industrial Revolution. In this regard, Russia has initiated creating a Center for Industrial Competencies for the BRICS Countries as a new stage in developing cooperation under the Partnership on New Industrial (Digital) Revolution.

Based on the active cooperation in the field of competition law and policy, a respective center for interaction between competition authorities of BRICS countries will be established as a result of the Russian chairmanship.

The agreements concerning the response to new challenges and threats are notable as well. BRICS adopted its Anti-Terrorism Strategy. The activities to combat drug trafficking and drug crime have been resumed. Our joint efforts to ensure security in the use of information and communications technologies are on the rise.

Notably, BRICS activities were supplemented with two new formats proposed by Russia – Women’s Business Alliance and the Energy Research Platform.

The people-to-people and cultural ties, as well as contacts between experts and civil society representatives of BRICS countries are expanding.

Due to the deepening collaboration between the five countries, there is no surprise that BRICS is a centre of attraction for many states and organizations.
BRICS together with constructively-minded partners can and should take an active part in shaping the global architecture in the post-coronavirus world. As the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said: ‘BRICS is a striking example of the effectiveness of multipolar diplomacy. Countries with different cultural and civilizational backgrounds have united on the basis of a constructive foreign policy philosophy, so in demand in the tumultuous modern world.’

**SCO: ensuring security in the post-coronavirus world**

As much as important is Russia’s chairmanship in SCO, which we have been holding since June 2019. The SCO, comprising eight permanent members (China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), four observers and six dialogue partners, has evolved to play an important role in ensuring peace, security and sustainable development in the Eurasian region.

Russia’s priorities for this year are:
- consolidating SCO member states and expanding cooperation;
- launching an inter-parliamentary track;
- strengthening SCO’s leadership in ensuring security and stability;
- synergy among the national development strategies and multilateral integration projects;
- expanding economic and cultural links.

In the framework of the said directions the SCO countries are working on combating international terrorism, illegal drug trafficking, cross-border organised crime and cybercrime, as well as economic cooperation, transport connectivity and creating transparent and more favourable conditions for trade and investment.

We succeeded in harmonizing methods of our work and holding major SCO meetings both online and in person, including the September sessions of Council of Foreign Ministers and Council of Defense Ministers. By the way, the latter was arranged for the first time in a broadened format – with participation of not only defense ministers of SCO, but from Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) countries as well.
Teleconferences were actively used to conduct meeting of heads of the sanitary-epidemiological services, tourist organizations, supreme courts, environment, emergencies, health and technology ministries. These online meetings followed numerous contacts of experts in transport and finance, as well as working groups meetings and SOM commissions.

In line with the SCO Antinarcotic Strategy for 2018-2023 and together with our SCO partners in May 2020 we conducted ‘Spiderweb’ international antidrug operation.

Despite Covid-19 limitations, we emphasized the importance of a gradual restoration of academic mobility in SCO countries as an integral part of an effective educational process. A long-term action plan for the SCO University – a flagship initiative to create a network of the leading SCO educational institutions – until 2023 was adopted.

By November we are planning to pass a number of statements on international issues such as countering the spread of terrorist, separatist and extremist ideology, cooperation in ensuring international information security and on countering the drug threat. A number of other draft statements proposed by our partners that will focus on cooperation in high technologies and digital economy.

We plan to adopt an action plan for the term 2021-2025 to implement the SCO Development Strategy 2025. This is a comprehensive document defining priorities of SCO cooperation in politics, security, economy and humanitarian sphere.

Our partners and we share a common vision of how the present-day world should look like. As Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said, "The SCO insists that this world should be fair, democratic, and based on respect to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all the nations without exception."

In addition, we intend to broaden international ties of the SCO Secretariat through the network of memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with the UN bodies (there is one between SCO and UNESCAP), Eurasian Economic Commission etc.
Russia promotes closer cooperation between SCO and ASEAN both in accordance with the MoU between their Secretariats signed in 2005 and with ASEAN Member States. For example, Cambodia is a dialogue partner of SCO.

Within the context of developing SCO-ASEAN ties Thailand, in our view, could consider the possibility of joining the SCO’s Convention on Combating Extremism that entered into force in May 2019. The Convention underscores the parties’ willingness to combat the spread of extremism, which is a breeding ground for terrorism, and provides a common legal standard for the international community to address this significant issue. The Convention is universal and open for accession by non-SCO states supporting its provisions.

**Fighting COVID-19 in inclusive formats**

BRICS and SCO countries emphasize that the fight against the pandemic requires decisive and coordinated multilateral efforts with the central role of the UN system, including the WHO, and other international organisations.

We also reiterated the pressing need to preserve jobs and income, in particular for the most vulnerable groups of society. Our countries underscored the urgency of restoring international growth and trade, strengthening markets stability and resilience as well as mitigating the consequences for sustainable development.

Consultations between sanitary and epidemiological services and healthcare ministries were held on both tracks in order to draft comprehensive plans to counter epidemic threats.

Moreover, as the readers of this article may know, two Russian-made vaccines against Covid-19 have been registered in our country already. And the 3rd stage trials of the said vaccines is being conducted in many BRICS and SCO states in order to ensure the prompt registration and future vaccination of population.

It is also worth noting, that using the fight against COVID-19 as a pretext some countries are expediting the creation of exclusive frameworks in the Asia-Pacific, thus sidelining the existing formats, including ASEAN-led mechanisms. On the contrary, BRICS and SCO countries advocate for solving the said tasks in open and cooperative way for the mutual benefit of all participants.
75 years of Victory in the Second World War and the UN

This year marks the 75th Anniversary of the Victory in the Second World War and the creation of the UN. In both tracks it was stressed that the shared Victory over Nazism, fascism and militarism and the establishment of the UN in 1945 helped to build a sustainable and effective system of international relations that enabled humankind to develop in peace. We further call for a resolute stand against the rehabilitation of Nazi ideology, racism and xenophobia and the distortion of history.

As for the UN through all these years our countries commit to the central coordinating role of the Organization and its Security Council in strengthening international peace and security, fostering development around the world, promoting and defending human rights.

Let us not forget that cooperation and joint efforts will help us to overcome any current or future challenges!

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Those readers who wish to learn more about Russia’s priorities in BRICS and SCO can visit official websites of Russian chairmanships in the said formats: www.eng.brics-russia2020.ru and www.eng.sco-russia2020.ru.