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Brazil towards the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine¹

Brazylia wobec agresji Federacji Rosyjskiej na Ukrainę

Abstract: The article presents research results regarding Brazil's policy and position towards the annexation of Crimea, the conflict in the eastern regions of Ukraine, and the full-scale aggression in 2022. The legal basis of Brazil's relations with the Russian Federation is discussed as well as their development in recent years, including multilateral cooperation within BRICS. The article also presents an analysis of the conditions and premises of Brazil's policy towards the war in Ukraine, which has a cautious, inconsistent, and ambivalent position in this respect. During the research, the historical method, content analysis method, comparative method, and systemic method were used.

Keywords: Brazil, Russia, war in Ukraine, conflict

Streszczenie: W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań dotyczące polityki i stanowiska Brazylii wobec aneksji Krymu, konfliktu we wschodnich regionach Ukrainy, a także pełnoskalowej agresji w 2022 r. Omówiono podstawy prawne stosunków Brazylii z Federacją Rosyjską, a także ich rozwój w ostatnich latach, w tym współpracę wielostronną w ramach BRICS. W artykule przedstawiono również analizę uwarunkowań i przesłanek polityki Brazylii wobec wojny na Ukrainie, która zajmuje w tym względzie ostrożne, niespójne i ambiwalentne stanowisko. W trakcie badań zastosowano metodę historyczną, metodę analizy treści, metodę porównawczą oraz systemową.

Słowa kluczowe: Brazylia, Rosja, wojna w Ukrainie, konflikt

Introduction

Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022 has led to a complete change in the geopolitical situation and the security conditions in the Central and Eastern European region. This aggression has re-

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sulted in a change in international conditions and a complete collapse of the existing regional security system. The change occurred both in the deterioration of relations between most European countries and the Russian Federation as well as in the increase in military spending due to concerns about the growing threat of potential aggression by the Russian Federation. The aim of the article is to analyse the perception of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine and its consequences from the point of view of a broader international perspective and the approach of Brazil and BRICS to the ongoing war in Ukraine. The article discusses the conditions and foundations of bilateral relations between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, including Brazil's policy towards the annexation of Crimea, the conflict in the eastern regions of the Ukrainian state, and the full-scale war that started in 2022.

1. Brazilian-Russian relations

It should be emphasised that a very important event in the context of relations between the Russian Federation and Brazil was the signing of the Treaty on Partnership Relations on 22 June 2000. According to the signed document, both sides declared their will to develop mutual relations at the bilateral level regarding the political, economic, and social aspects as well as in terms of international cooperation. One of these aspects indicated in the document was the issue related to the functioning of the United Nations. The Russian Federation and Brazil also referred to cooperation in strengthening the operation of the United Nations in the international arena and reforming the operation of this structure².

In this respect, it is important to note that Brazil has been advocating for many years the reform of the Security Council and the expansion of the list of members of this structure, which still reflects the conditions from the period of its establishment after World War

2 *Договор о партнерских отношениях между Российской Федерацией и Федеративной Республикой Бразилией*. Ратифицирован Федеральным законом РФ от 18 июня 2001 года N 79-ФЗ [*Dogowor o partnerskich odnoszenijach miezdu Rossijskoj Fiedieracyjej i Fiedieratiwnoj Riespublikoj Brazilijej*]. Ratyfikowany Fiedieralnym zakonom RF ot 18 ijunia 2001 goda N 79-FZ], <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901812576> [20.09.2023].

II³. In the above-mentioned document, the Russian Federation and Brazil also announced joint actions to strengthen the role and importance of the United Nations in the world, solve the most important problems in the international arena, and create a new international order⁴.

With regard to bilateral cooperation, the Russian Federation and Brazil declared that they would further deepen and expand their mutual dialogue, aimed at developing bilateral relations and solving regional security problems. Intensive development of political contacts as well as dialogue in the field of international affairs and the area of foreign policy, socio-economic aspects, and economic transformation was also declared⁵.

2. Brazilian-Russian relations

An important aspect in the analysis of Brazil's policy towards the Central and Eastern European region was the events of 2013 and 2014, which led to a complete change in security conditions in Eastern Europe. Due to the outbreak of the Revolution of Dignity, Brazil emphasised the need to resolve the conflict peacefully and avoid bloodshed. It was pointed out that each state has the sovereign right to pursue its interests in the international arena, depending on specific priorities and goals in the state's foreign and security policy⁶.

The Revolution of Dignity and the takeover of power in Kyiv by the opposition were questioned by the Russian Federation, which accused the new Ukrainian authorities of illegally taking power and overthrowing the previous president. Therefore, the Russian Federation questioned the legality of the new authorities of the Ukrainian state and their representation in the international arena. In this respect, it was also suggested that the Revolution of Dignity was inspired by the Western world, with the key role of the United States and the North Atlan-

3 Consultations and research interviews with scientists during a research internship at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, February 2023.

4 *Договор о партнерских отношениях...*

5 *Ibid.*

6 Consultations and research interviews with scientists during a research internship at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, February 2023.

tic Alliance striving to weaken the position of the Russian Federation in the international arena. It was pointed out that the West was taking actions aimed at counteracting the increasing role and importance of the Russian Federation in the world and its global position. It was emphasised that the United States and the North Atlantic Alliance were particularly active in relation to the part of the post-Soviet area that the Russian Federation treats as its exclusive sphere of influence.

Therefore, it is worth noting that in the following weeks of 2014, Russia began implementing retaliatory actions and decided to enter into an open conflict with Ukraine. The first aspect of this was the launch of a hybrid war and the preparation of the process of the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. Russia began to question the area's belonging to Ukraine, once again undermining Ukraine's territorial integrity and Kyiv's sovereignty over the peninsula. Ultimately, after a series of actions aimed at separating Crimea from Ukraine, on 18 March 2014, Russia formally annexed and incorporated this territory into the territorial units of the Russian state. This event, which was a violation of the basic principles of international law, was a dramatic shift in the geopolitical conditions and security processes in Eastern Europe. Taking into account the consequences of the annexation and the violation of international law, the actions of the Russian Federation have led to criticism from numerous countries in the international arena. It is worth noting, however, that in this respect, European countries and the United States have adopted a fairly uniform position. These countries all emphasised that Russia had violated the basic principles of international law and a number of basic international documents regulating peaceful coexistence between states.

Such a position was not common within the entire international community and depended on a given continent, thus it is worth analysing Brazil's position towards the actions taken by Russia and the annexation carried out in 2014. In this respect, Brazil took a cautious approach, not openly criticising Russia's actions and avoiding clear assessments of the annexation process⁷.

7 O. Stuenkel, *Why Brazil has not criticised Russia over Crimea*, Policy Brief, May 2014, NOREF, pp. 1–4; Consultations and research interviews with scientists during a research internship at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

A similar situation occurred as the conflict further intensified and separatist movements began in the eastern regions of Ukraine. The establishment of separatist republics by the Russian Federation, which, inspired by Russia, declared independence and separation from Ukraine, led to a further intensification of the conflict. As a result, Ukraine decided to take defensive measures and started fighting the separatists, and so the situation in Ukraine deteriorated once again, leading to destabilisation and the collapse of the existing regional security system in Central and Eastern Europe. The development of the situation in the eastern regions of Ukraine and the ongoing military operations have once again focussed the international community, however, there are large differences in the response of individual countries, depending on the continent and regional division.

In this regard, Brazil has taken a very conservative and neutral position. The authorities of this country emphasized the need to start talks and resolve the conflict peacefully. In the situation of ongoing military operations, Brazil stressed the need to end them as soon as possible and return to peace talks. From its position, Brazil did not openly criticize the Russian Federation, once again highlighting the need to conduct negotiations and strive to end the conflict through diplomatic actions⁸.

Therefore, Brazil welcomed the announcement of the decision to start talks in the Normandy format as well as their continuation in the Minsk format. The lack of effectiveness of these talks and the implementation of the agreements reached *de facto* led to the freezing of the conflict in the eastern regions of Ukraine. Its effect was to reduce the interest of the international community, including Brazil, in this issue, and the authorities there did not comment on this situation and the development of the geopolitical situation and security conditions in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. These issues were also not the subject of public debate and social interest, which largely focused on the country's internal issues and socio-economic problems⁹.

8 Consultations and research interviews with scientists during a research internship at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, February 2023.

9 Consultations and research interviews with scientists during a research internship at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, February 2023.

Brazil has been experiencing very significant internal problems for many years, among which the problems of high unemployment, homelessness, low wages, and social poverty come to the fore. A separate problem in this respect is also the functioning of excluded social settlements, with limited control and supervision of state services, which largely reflects the functioning of socially excluded places. Therefore, as mentioned, the issues of geopolitical conditions in Central and Eastern Europe and the evolution of the security situation in this area have not been the subject of a more thorough public debate in Brazil¹⁰.

3. Full-scale aggression against Ukraine

It is also worth noting that just before the Russian Federation began its aggression against Ukraine, important talks took place between the authorities of both countries. On 16 February 2022, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro paid an official visit to Moscow and met with the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin. During the talks, a number of issues were raised regarding bilateral cooperation between the Russian Federation and Brazil; cooperation in the multilateral dimension but in a rather limited way the leaders referred to the geopolitical situation in the Central and Eastern European region, with particular emphasis on Ukraine in this regard¹¹.

During this meeting, the presidents of both countries expressed their satisfaction with the current development of Brazilian-Russian relations; Putin and Bolsonaro stressed their interest in further developing bilateral relations and strengthening the strategic partnership, including deepening the political dialogue. An important tool in this process was the recent implementation of bilateral visits at the highest level as well as other forms and mechanisms of bilateral cooperation. During the meeting, Putin and Bolsonaro emphasised the importance of the decisions that were adopted during the 11th

10 L.G. Costa, C. Scalon, *Income Inequality and Social Stratification in Brazil: Key Determining Factors and Changes in the First Decade of the 21st Century*, [in:] L.I. Peilin et al. (eds.), *Handbook on Social Stratification in the BRIC Countries*, pp. 421–437.

11 *Совместное заявление Президента Российской Федерации В.В.Путина и Президента Бразилии Ж.Болсонаро* [Sowmiestnoje zajawlenie Priezidenta Rossijskoj Fiedieracyi W.W.Putina i Priezidenta Brazilii Ž.Bolsonaro], <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5774> [20.09.2023].

meeting of the Government Commission of the Russian Federation and Brazil on trade, economic, scientific, and technical cooperation. The meeting of this commission took place in October 2021 in Brazil and concerned the most important aspects in the further development of economic, scientific, and technical cooperation¹².

One important point during the meeting in Moscow related to economic issues regarding the development and deepening of trade between the Russian Federation and Brazil, with particular emphasis on industries that were developing in recent years, including agriculture, energy, the defence industry, environmental protection and nature as well as technology and science. In terms of trade, both sides expressed their interest in equalising the trade balance. Therefore, the presidents of both countries appealed to Brazilian and Russian entrepreneurs for greater interest in economic cooperation, increased interstate investments, and activities aimed at further intensification of economic cooperation¹³.

Taking into account the issues that are important from the point of view of the geopolitical situation in the region, the conditions for energy security were also the subject of talks between the presidents of the Russian Federation and Brazil. In this aspect, it should be emphasised that Russia has been making efforts for several years to diversify its energy raw material supply routes, which is related to its interests in increasing its presence in global markets and the internal markets of individual countries. During the talks, Putin and Bolsonaro reinforced their willingness to develop cooperation in the energy sector and new investments in this area. The interest of both countries in the development of new energy technologies and the use of renewable energy sources was also noted. An important aspect of the exchange of experience and cooperation in this area, especially regarding the acquisition of new energy sources, were declarations regarding the exploration of deposits and energy resources at sea as well as the implementation of various forms of activities and projects aimed at the development

12 Ibid.; *Заявления для прессы по итогам российско-бразильских переговоров [Zajawlenija dla priessy po itogam rossijsko-brazilskich pieriegoworow]*, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67789> [20.09.2023].

13 *Совместное заявление...*

of hydrogen programs. Nuclear energy was a separate category of energy cooperation in which both sides expressed their will to develop¹⁴.

It is also worth mentioning that the Russian-Brazilian talks included issues of bilateral cooperation and the deepening of various cooperation mechanisms in this area. The Russian Federation and Brazil declared willingness to deepen cooperation and exchange military experience, and the first high-level consultations on security and foreign affairs were held. To this end, for the first time in the history of relations between the Russian Federation and Brazil, joint talks took place in the “two plus two” format. The heads of foreign ministries and defence ministers of both countries took part in them, focusing on issues related to international and security issues¹⁵.

Worthy of note is that in the official documents regarding this meeting, as well as during the speeches, no reference was made to the tense situation in Central and Eastern Europe. It is all the more important to note, which is very important in the context of aggression, that both countries have declared their will to resolve all disputes peacefully and strive to maintain peace and international stability. The Russian Federation and Brazil also announced greater coordination of activities and cooperation at the United Nations Security Council¹⁶.

Brazil consistently supports the reform of the operating system of this UN body, which is key from the point of view of international security and global stability. Reforming the UN system, including the Security Council, is one of the priority directions of Brazil's diplomacy. For many years, this country has been voicing its growing aspirations and importance in the international arena, pointing to the need to join new countries that are permanent members of the Security Council. The above aspirations of Brazil in the international arena reflect the political programs of the most important political forces in the field of foreign policy. Brazilian politicians stress that the role and importance of the state has increased significantly, and Brazil has the strength and means to play a global role in the system of international relations and global security. Therefore, Brazil consistently

14 Переговоры с Президентом Бразилии Жаиром Болсонаро [Pieriegoworys Priezidentom Brazilii Žairom Bołsonaro], <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67778> [20.09.2023].

15 Совместное заявление...

16 Ibid.; Заявления для прессы по итогам...

supports the above-mentioned reform of the UN functioning system and its inclusion in the permanent members of the Security Council, therefore, it is making efforts to obtain the support of other countries for such a solution, including the Russian Federation¹⁷.

4. The multilateral dimension of Brazilian-Russian cooperation

One of the most important forums for multilateral cooperation between the Russian Federation and Brazil is BRICS. This structure, established in 2009, was intended to deepen cooperation between the countries that constitute it, in both the political and economic areas. The creation of this new mechanism of cooperation in the international arena was a reflection of the Russian president's plans to create new formats of activities that could increase the role and importance of the Russian Federation in the international arena. In this regard, Russia has taken steps to involve other countries in order to create a forum for cooperation that poses a challenge and competition to the Western world, including the primacy of the United States in the international arena¹⁸.

Therefore, it is important to note that Brazil joined this body and participated in the anti-Western rhetoric that was voiced during the summits as well as in many decisions made by the authorities of the BRICS countries. This forum was largely under the influence of the Russian Federation and China, which is also shown by the situation related to the annexation of Crimea, the war in the eastern regions of Ukraine, and the full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine in 2022¹⁹.

5. Brazil and BRICS towards the war in Ukraine

The above analysis shows that the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014; the illegal detachment of the peninsula from

17 Consultations and research interviews with scientists during a research internship at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, February 2023.

18 C. de Coning, *BRICS and coexistence*, [in:] idem, T. Mandrup, L. Odgaard (eds.), *The BRICS and Coexistence. An alternative vision of world order*, New York 2015, pp. 25, 37.

19 B. de Conti, É. de Almeida Oliveira, J.V. Cateia, *Brazil and BRICS*, [in:] R. Kumar et al. (eds.), *Locating BRICS in the Global Order. Perspectives from the Global South*, pp. 141–149.

Ukraine, and Russia's violation of the basic principles of international law did not significantly change Brazil's policy towards Russia or the Central and Eastern European region. As mentioned, a similar process took place in connection with the Russian-led separatist movements in the eastern regions of Ukraine and the armed conflict in that country. At the official level, Brazil appealed for a peaceful solution to the conflict, while cooperating with the Russian Federation both bilaterally and multilaterally.

A similar situation occurred in 2022 when the Russian Federation began military operations with a direct attack against Ukraine. Brazil's position on Russia's aggression and actions was evasive and the country's authorities failed to openly criticise or condemn the Russian attack on Ukraine. Brazil once again promoted the need to end military operations and settle the conflict through diplomatic actions²⁰.

It is also apparent that during the ongoing war and continued aggression against Ukraine, Brazil, together with the other BRICS countries, continued to expand cooperation with Russia. During the BRICS summit held in South Africa in August 2023, strategic decisions were made to deepen cooperation within this structure, related to the admission of new member states. Furthermore, in the final document adopted at that time, BRICS almost entirely omitted the war in Ukraine, once again pointing to the need to mediate the conflict and resolve the conflict through diplomatic talks²¹.

Conclusions

Taking into account Brazil's current foreign and security policy, one of its priorities is diplomatic activity aimed at maintaining international peace and security as well as working to resolve ongoing conflicts. Therefore, a more active Brazilian policy could be assumed in the context of the annexation of Crimea, the war in the eastern regions of Ukraine after 2014, and diplomatic actions in connection

20 Consultations and research interviews with scientists during a research internship at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, February 2023.

21 *XV BRICS Summit Johannesburg II Declaration BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development, and Inclusive Multilateralism*, Sandton, Gauteng, South Africa, 23 August 2023, <https://brics2023.gov.za/2023/07/05/summit-declarations/> [20.09.2023].

with the full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation in 2022. Brazil has maintained a very cautious stance in this respect, not openly criticising the Russian Federation and calling for an end to the conflict through negotiations and diplomatic talks. Therefore, in this respect, Brazil has pursued a de facto policy that was beneficial from the point of view of the Russian Federation, which, in the context of a significant deterioration of relations with Western countries, had a key interest in maintaining international contacts and their development. These processes are also confirmed by the international activity of BRICS. The decisions taken recently are also beneficial for the Russian Federation due to the expansion of this structure and the anti-Western dimension of its activities, which are also legitimised by Brazil, which confirms the ambiguous, inconsistent, and de facto favourable policy and position towards Russia's interests including war in Ukraine.

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