Imperial College Brazil Forum

Minutes of the Brazil Forum Annual Meeting 2012

Date: Tuesday 13th November 2012 (2.30pm – 3.30pm with reception afterwards).

Venue: Boardroom, Grantham Institute for Climate Change, Imperial College, South Kensington Campus. London SW7 2AZ.

Attendees:
Alexandre Strapasson (chairman), Allan Leal, Andrew Czyzewski, Borame Dickens, Chiara Candelise, Cristina Banks-Leite, Davino Sena, Dirce Maria Marchioni, Gad Frankel, Jeremy Woods, Jeroen Lamb, Jonathan London, Jonny Blaker, Juliana Bertazzo, Marcello Contestabile, Marina Correa Segalla, Michael Pawlicki, Mitchell D’Arcy, Prisca Merz, Rafael Gomes Fernandes, Ricardo Pereira, Roberto Jaguaribe (Ambassador), Rodrigo Moreno-Serra, Roseli Wedemann, Roulin Khondoker, Sarah Shepley, Spencer Sherwin, Stelios Koutsasftakis, Ulrike Hillemann-Delaney.

Apologies:

Minutes prepared by: Michael Pawlicki and Alexandre Strapasson with contributions and key notes taken by Prisca Merz.

SUMMARY NOTES:

Introduction

Alexandre Strapasson initiated the meeting by welcoming all the members and the special guest Ambassador Roberto Jaguaribe and his team. Alexandre introduced the agenda for the meeting and briefly talked about the objectives of the Brazil Forum, key past activities and news, the main research projects currently in progress related to Brazil at the College and the importance of involving more alumni and enlarging the Forum’s networks. The Ambassador made a speech about the relationship between Brazil and the UK, current challenges in social and economic development of his country and the need for greater cooperation between Brazil and the UK on an institutional and private level. The meeting was concluded by the questions and answers session where members of the Brazil Forum asked questions related to the obstacles each one came across when doing business or interacting with Brazil on academic level. The meeting was followed by a food and drinks reception which was open to all attendees.
Speech of Ambassador Roberto Jaguaribe

Ambassador Roberto Juaguaribe thanked Alexandre Strapasson and all other members of the Brazil Forum for the invitation to the meeting. The cooperation between Brazil and the UK has a long history, with the peak of trade between the two countries had coming at the beginning of the last century. Nevertheless, the interests of the two countries have never been so reciprocal as today. Emerging economies such as Brazil are fundamental to the UK’s trade and industry growth. Other EU countries are ahead in business collaboration with Brazil and this is due to the lack of attention the UK paid to Latin America in the past. Nowadays other European states such as Germany, France, Portugal and Sweden lead the EU – Brazil trade statistics. The Ambassador acknowledged Brazil has recently experienced positive socio-economic changes but the challenges in the areas of social, political and economic affairs, as well as culture, education and the environment remain strong. Despite the economic problems affecting the UK, Brazil seeks to reach the level of competitiveness and social balance existing in this country and perceives the UK as a source of academic excellence, which is a reference for increased cooperation on institutional and personal levels.

There are challenges in the way Brazilian academic institutions work together with their international counterparts and vice versa, but the problem is being dealt with by relevant institutions in Brazil. The Brazilian economy demands technically trained professionals. Nevertheless, at present only 6% of Brazilian students choose technical courses comparing to 30% in South Korea. Brazil must help its students in accessing educational opportunities overseas, particularly in the UK, a country with a long and outstanding record of high quality academic education. Academic courses with one year abroad are the kind of opportunities that can open minds and provoke a positive change. There is a need for greater collaboration on the postgraduate and PhD dimension.

Brazil sees itself as a key player in the climate change arena and seeks closer cooperation with other countries in the fields of production of oil, gas, biofuels, protection of natural environment and aeronautics – industries Brazil is increasingly knowledgeable about and innovative in. Brazil is planning to increase their current total energy consumption from sustainable resources (currently 46% of the primary energy mix), but in order to achieve it the country must overcome significant challenges. For example, the plan of Brazilian government to construct a new hydroelectric power plant in the Amazon, which is a great engineering project that poses an enormous environmental challenge, as among other issues 14% of all fresh water in the world has its source in Brazil.

Discussions and questions by BF members

Raising the point that Brazilian authorities offer no support to SMEs from the UK hoping to conduct business in Brazil, when an effective programme is already in place in the UK to support exports to Brazil, the first question asked what support can the Brazilian embassy offer to SMEs in both Brazil and the UK. The Ambassador responded by saying that there is a scheme similar to the UK one for Brazilian SMEs wanting to export to the UK. Countries are interested in helping boost exports rather than imports in general. Though the embassy in the UK does provide advice to Brazilian companies hoping to operate in the UK and is also open to UK business for advice as well.

The second question was regarding the difficulty British citizens have in getting research permits and the relevant visas for Brazil. The Ambassador replied saying that due to past mistakes in handing out visas and permits without proper caution, systematic failures including the ‘exploitation of indigenous Brazilian people’ occurred. Now Brazil is taking more care with their visa and access
programmes to protect its natural legacy. The issue of environmental protection is a legal one, not a scientific one and more work needs to be done on it on a national and international level.

The Ambassador was then asked about what is being done, or what can be done, to make it easier for Brazilian citizens with qualifications gained in foreign countries to have their qualifications recognised in Brazil. He responded by admitting it is a problem that needs to be resolved quickly. He said that the Brazilian Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education (CAPES) president has recently looked at how Brazil can improve the process of qualifications recognition in Brazil and how the bureaucracy causing the problem can be reduced to a minimum.

He was then asked what the Brazilian authorities do to facilitate the entry of UK students to Brazil, given the high numbers of students from Brazil studying in the UK. He responded by saying that agreements between the UK and Brazilian universities exist and the only legal requirement for accessing Brazilian education are relevant visas and currently they are allocated on case by case basis. The Brazilian authorities are active in other parts of the globe to encourage students to come to Brazilian universities such as Portuguese speaking parts of Africa.

The Ambassador was then asked, what Brazil could do to equal the financial and employment incentives offered to Brazilian graduates in the UK in order to tempt and retain the talented graduates of Brazil in Brazil. His response was that SWB was designed to address this very problem. There are full scholarships available to Brazilian students under the condition that they will return to Brazil upon completing of their overseas study. Over the last few years, Brazil has seen influx of qualified South Europeans coming to Brazil in search for jobs and business opportunities on corporate level.

The next BF member asked a question regarding the emphasis on academic work in Brazilian universities, which comes at the heavy cost of practical knowledge and whether this can be changed. The Ambassador replied that there are large numbers of students in Brazil attending schools of questionable quality which is a serious problem that should be dealt with immediately. Ultimately, he said, that there are less students in Brazil to meet demand and Brazil must encourage more students to universities and create more quality places at universities.

The final question was regarded what the questioner saw as insensible hiring practices in the Brazilian university sector. They pointed out that there is a discrimination for local teachers over visiting scholars who may be more qualified, and therefore making difficult the integration with international academics. The Ambassador responded that these limitations are common to Brazilian public universities and less so to private universities.

After this session, Alexandre closed the meeting, but encouraged members to keep discussing in the food and drinks reception.

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