



EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

The rise of emerging economies, such as Brazil, China and South Africa, is predominantly viewed under the aspect of the balance of power in international relations. The question dominating the debate in academic and political circles appears to be what it means for the established industrialised nations – most notably the Western ones – as well as world politics when other countries are closing the gap and pushing their way into the big league. But while this focus may be justified, one should pay similar attention to what is happening within the societies in those countries.

Numerous African, Asian and Latin-American societies are experiencing a wave of middle class growth, assuming an income of ten to 100 U.S. dollars a day as the reference point. This is due to a catching-up process, which has been taking place over the last two decades. In 2013, the emerging economies, which make up 85 per cent of the world's population, accounted for approximately half of global GDP. This continued dynamic development has allowed millions of households to share in their countries' prosperity. It is estimated that 3.2 billion people will belong to the middle class by 2020.

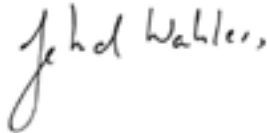
However, a look beyond these figures reveals some downsides: increasing social inequality, vulnerability, disappointment with government services, little or no political co-determination. Also, there are high hopes resting on members of the middle class. Where economics are concerned, they are shouldering the role of a group with increasing spending power that is expected to increase tax revenues and stimulate domestic consumption. At the same time, they are considered key actors capable of furthering political and social change. The reports from Latin America and South Africa on this issue illustrate the nature of these expectations in some detail. In his article on the

situation of the middle classes in South America, Stefan Jost advocates a differentiated and country-specific analysis, which should focus mainly on the potential of these groups of the population to function as significant actors. Only then will it be possible to derive consequences for social and development policies: "The rise of the middle classes could be used as a vehicle for developing and strengthening Latin American civil societies. [...] The question also remains as to whether the current party systems are in a position to absorb and dissect these particular developments in order to formulate specific policies that are capable of gaining widespread or majority support."

In Brazil, which is in the run-up to the presidential elections in October, the emerging middle class is still reluctant to get involved in politics, as Christian Matthäus and Kathrin Zeller have found. People's worries about holding on to their new acquisitions have so far prevented them from translating their dissatisfaction with the deficiencies in public infrastructure into a political agenda. However, the football World Cup and the election campaign have stimulated some movement within the Brazilian middle class over recent months. Taking the African National Congress as an example, Amuzweni Ngoma has been examining the way political parties are homing in on the middle class as a target group and at the question of whether they are, in fact, capable of articulating its interests. For a long time, the party had been able to count on widespread approval by the black middle class. But the parliamentary elections in May showed that this supposedly solid support is crumbling. The author considers this an opportunity for greater political diversity in South Africa.

The growth of the middle classes is a global trend. However, the opportunities it offers go hand in hand with socio-economic and complex political challenges. If the achievements of governments continually lag behind people's expectations and if the new members of the middle class cannot pass their modest, newly acquired wealth on to the next generation, this is likely to generate increasing potential for unrest in the individual societies. Should that unrest materialise, it will be important for democratic forces within civil society to be ready to voice the needs of the middle class and to make a strong impact in political

competition. In this context, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung is a partner that is in great demand around the world. Sustainable development will only be possible if there is a consolidated middle class, which stands on a sound, independent economic footing and has the self-assurance to take on political responsibility.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerhard Wahlers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'G'.

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