

Mutually beneficial cooperation

INTERVIEW WITH HE PHAM GIA KHIEM

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, VIETNAM



PHAM GIA KHIEM

was educated at Bac Thai University prior to receiving a PhD in metallurgy. He held important posts at the Ministry of Planning and Investment, becoming Minister of Science, Technology and Environment in 1996. He became deputy Prime Minister in 1997 adding the Foreign Affairs portfolio in 2006.

Could you please give an insight to the fundamental goals, directions and guiding principles of Vietnam's foreign policy in the context of Asia's increasingly important role in the world economy?

The 21st century is offering great opportunities to nations on the one hand while presenting several challenges arising from regional and international uncertainties and changes on the other.

Against that backdrop, Vietnam is set to pursue the foreign policy of independence, sovereignty, openness, diversification and multilateralisation of foreign relations, proactive international economic integration and expansion of international cooperation in the spirit of 'Vietnam is a friend and reliable partner of countries in the international community' in order to ensure a peaceful and favourable international environment for the furtherance of the socio-economic development and turn Vietnam into a fundamentally industrialised and modern country by the year 2020.

Being a country in the dynamically developing Asia, Vietnam always desires for, and attaches great importance to, the establishment and development of friendship and comprehensive and mutually beneficial cooperation with other regional countries. In pursuing deep and full integration in the region and representing Asia in the UN Security Council, Vietnam will do whatever it can to fulfil its mission for the sake of peace and prosperity in the region and the world.

Global security is a key issue for governments and policy makers. In your views, what role can the UN and NATO play to maintain stability? What role can ASEAN and other regional organisations play in this context?

The burning desire of mankind is to live in peace, cooperation and development. Regrettably, local wars and armed conflicts still occur in various continents, causing negative effects on the security and development of all nations. Under the international community's mandate, the UN has been performing its important role in the maintenance of international security through its peace keeping and building activities, promoting disarmament, preventing and tackling international disputes and conflicts, protecting the right to independence and self-determination of nations and improving international security and development. To this end, the UN should

further reform itself in terms of its organisational structure and working systems. Apart from the UN, other regional organisations should also contribute actively to the maintenance of peace and stability in their respective regions.

ASEAN has an important role to play in regional security. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was formed by a joint ASEAN initiative. After 13 years of operation, ARF now comprises of 26 members, thus expanding its quality and scale in maintaining peace, security and stability in the region. At present, ARF is shifting from confidence building to Preventive Diplomacy (PD) in addressing new and complicated issues of anti-terrorism, trans-national crime, maritime security, epidemics and disaster response, etc. Being a joint ASEAN initiative, the ARF must always evolve around its core, for example ASEAN.

Could you please brief our readers on the relationship between Vietnam and the European Union (EU) in recent years? How important is the EU to Vietnam as a diplomatic and trading partner?

As one of the leading socio-political and power centres of the world, the EU enjoys a very important position in Vietnam's foreign policy of multilateralisation and its diversification of international relations.

Vietnam-EU relations are currently developing positively in all areas of politics, economics, trade and investment, development cooperation, science and technology. Vietnam and the EU regularly exchange delegations and high level contacts, thus creating a good foundation for enhancing mutual understanding and comprehensive cooperation between the two sides. The EU is now one of Vietnam's top trading partners. Two-way trade turnover was close to US\$12 billion last year and keeps a constant high annual growth of 15-20 per cent. EU investors are present in almost all economic sectors in Vietnam with a total registered capital of US\$9 billion. Investment projects by European investors have contributed significantly to Vietnamese economic growth. In particular, the EU has always been one of Vietnam's largest ODA donors with the commitment of US\$940 million for 2007. EU assistance has been effective in furthering our priorities such as poverty reduction and hunger elimination, health care, education, human resources development and international integration. This

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has helped Vietnam achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Diverse cooperation and exchange in culture, education, science and technology have elevated the Vietnam-EU relations to a new stage of development.

Vietnam attaches great importance to developing its relationship with the EU. The Government of Vietnam has adopted the 'Master Plan for the Vietnam-EU Relations' and the 'Action Plan on the Development of Vietnam-European Union relations until 2010 with Orientations to 2015' in order to turn the Vietnam-EU relations into a 'comprehensive and sustainable partnership on the basis of long-term stability and mutual trust for the sake of peace, cooperation and prosperity in the following decades of the 21st century.' The EU is the first partner with whom Vietnam has developed such a plan for comprehensive cooperation. Vietnam is also the first Southeast Asian nation to launch this sort of a general strategy of cooperation with the EU. During EC President Manuel Barroso's recent visit to Vietnam last November, the two sides have begun negotiation on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between Vietnam and the EU. In addition, the two sides agreed on solutions to bring the Vietnam-EU relations to a new height in both scale and quality.

The upcoming visit of Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung to the United Kingdom, Germany and Ireland from 03-11 March this year will be a turning point in the economic, trade and investment cooperation between Vietnam and the three countries, thus bringing the cooperation between Vietnam with them in particular and with the EU in general into new era of depth and efficiency.

How does Vietnam perform its role in ensuring prosperity and stability in Asia? Could you please give an overview of the development of Vietnam's relationship with its neighbouring countries?

As a nation located in Asia, Vietnam attaches great importance to the building of peace, cooperation and development in the region for the sake of the prosperity of each nation, the entire continent and the world. As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the 2008-09 period and a representative of Asia on the body, Vietnam will function as a responsible representative in ensuring security, peace and stability in Asia and the world at large. In this spirit, Vietnam is actively strengthening and improving its multifaceted cooperation frameworks with Asian countries, particularly the neighbouring ones, in order to bring cooperation to a new depth with more substance and stability while at the same time proactively driving regional integration.

In recent years, the friendship and cooperation

between Vietnam and her neighbours in the region including China, Laos PDR, Cambodia and others continues to develop both comprehensively and effectively in all political, economic and cultural fields. The Vietnam-ASEAN relationship is also developing well thus allowing our relations with each member, as well as the entire Association, to drive toward the ASEAN Community by 2015. Vietnam and Japan have agreed to make more efforts to deepen our bilateral relations, moving towards a 'Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Asia.' Vietnam and the Republic of Korea enjoy the potential to enhance their cooperation for mutual development in order to bring their 'Comprehensive Partnership in the 21st Century' to a new height. The Vietnam-India relationship is also moving along a new strategic partnership.

How would you see the importance of regional integration in Asia's development? What are the mechanisms that help achieve the goals of establishing an Asian single market?

Regional integration is now very crucial to the development of each country and the whole region. This is not only the case for Asia but also for other regions in the world. The value of regional integration can be seen from the following perspectives:

Economically speaking, regional integration improves the effectiveness of production of regional countries and enhances the competitiveness of each economy and the region as a whole. Economic integration is considered as the foundation to boost other integration processes.

Socially speaking, regional integration helps solve many common issues in a geographic area such as climate change and other environmental problems, epidemics and diseases, sustainable development and the sharing of cultural values.

In terms of politics and security, enhancing regional integration is a commitment to building an environment of peace, stability, cooperation and development. In return, the commitment helps promote socio-economic integration, thus meeting the development goals.

However, regional integration is just the first important and objective precondition for each nation's development. The policies of bringing into full play each nation's inner strength and making the most use of the opportunities brought by regional integration are decisive factors in their own development.

The strong and stable growth in an environment of peace and cooperation in Asia over the past years is the result of implementing each nation's development policies at home combined with enhancing regional integration, especially economic integration. Moreover, given current globalisation, economic integration in Asia no longer limits itself in the

narrow geographic boundaries but rather, accelerates inter-regional integration.

With regard to the Asian single market, it is, in my view, a bit too early to talk of this due to Asia's large geographic area, and the diversified political, economic, social and cultural systems, especially the development gap among Asian nations. As such, we do not have the foundations to consider the establishment of an Asian single market. Asia is now on the path of establishing and promoting some mechanisms of cooperation and economic integration in each region such as ASEAN in Southeast Asia, ASEAN+3 and East Asia Summit in East Asia, South Asia, etc. In the near term, we need to enhance economic integration and cooperation to build on the potential of an Asian single market.

How do you view Vietnam's international role in the next decade?

The success of the renewal in Vietnam's socio-economic development has indeed strengthened the

country's. In addition, with a population of more than 85 million, a culture deeply embedded with national identity and its political stability, Vietnam is receiving increasing respect from countries in the region and the world. They provide the important platform for Vietnam to develop and actively contribute to the international community.

As an ASEAN member, Vietnam attaches great importance to its active participation in building the ASEAN Community by 2015 and bringing to fruition the central role of ASEAN in Asia-Pacific cooperation. Besides, in pursuing its policy of deep and broad international integration, Vietnam has, and will continue to, play an active role in multilateral forums to which it is a member such as APEC, ASEM, Francophone, Non-Aligned Movement, etc. In addition, as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (2008-09), Vietnam will make active and responsible contributions to peace, cooperation and development in the region and the world.

ASEAN has an important role to play in regional security

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