

# Strength in partnership

## INTERVIEW WITH HE TRAN QUANG HOAN

AMBASSADOR OF VIETNAM TO THE UNITED KINGDOM



**TRAN QUANG HOAN** is a graduate of Havana University, Cuba with a BA in languages. From 1970-93 he served in the Embassy in Cuba and was involved in Cuban relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From 1993-97 he worked at the Ministry in Planning (1993-94) and in Press and Information (1994-97). He was then appointed Ambassador in South America with responsibility for Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and Bolivia (1997-2002). Returning to the Ministry in 2002, he served as Director General and Head of Chancery, Head of Personnel and Organisation, and responsible for Vietnamese overseas until 2007 when he was appointed to his present role.

### What do you see as your key objectives in London and what role will the visit of the Prime Minister play in this regard?

The highest priority during my term of office in the UK is to contribute to furthering the bilateral ties between the two countries in the fields of trade, investment and education. Another objective of great importance is to strengthen the political relations between the two countries. Since Vietnam is the non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the 2008-09 term, the coordination and cooperation of Vietnam and the UK at the UNSC should be given a high priority. At the same time, I am trying to help increase the cultural exchanges between our two peoples. I believe that culture, which helps bring nations closer together, can effectively support the expansion of political and economic ties.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome the Vietnamese Prime Minister during his official visit to the UK. This visit by the Head of the Vietnamese Government is of special significance since it takes place at a time when Vietnam is entering a new development stage and Vietnam-UK relations have grown significantly in recent years. I am convinced that the visit will help elevate the bilateral relations to a higher plane.

### With a rapidly expanding economy, Vietnam offers the international investment community a wide range of opportunities. In which key sectors are you seeking foreign investment?

Since the introduction of the Investment Law in 1987, foreign investment is making an essential contribution to the fulfilment of our socio-economic objectives. At present, Vietnam is stepping up the process of industrialisation/ modernisation and the highest investment priority has been given to infrastructure projects such as the construction of highways, railways, ports, airport, etc. In addition, we welcome investment in the fields of energy, petrochemicals, high technology and so on.

### What has been the impact on the Vietnamese economy as a result of membership of AFTA, entry into the US Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement and accession to the WTO?

To raise national development, we have implemented the policy of capitalising on our indigenous strengths

which are considered decisive factors. At the same time, we attach great importance to international cooperation and are stepping up international economic integration. So far Vietnam has established economic relations with more than 220 countries and territories, is a member of many international institutions such as AFTA, ASEM, APEC and WTO, and has signed bilateral trade agreements with major countries such as the US and EU. International integration helps us mobilise external resources for national development, expand markets, develop partnerships and promote the market economy, making it more vibrant and efficient.

Some concrete figures: in 2007, exports reached US\$110 billion compared to US\$5 billion in the late 80s. Also in 2007, foreign investment in Vietnam reached US\$20.3 billion and ODA reached US\$35 billion from 2003. Over the past ten years, Vietnam's economy grows at an average 7-8 per cent, reaching 8.5 per cent in 2007. However, international integration also brings major challenges, especially to a developing country like ours and we are making enormous efforts to cope with these.

### How important is the bilateral relationship between the UK and Vietnam and how do you see it developing?

The UK is a country of great importance in both Europe and worldwide with a leading economy and strengths in finance, technology, management, etc. With tremendous achievements recorded in the past 20 years of Doimoi (renovation), Vietnam is in a very good position to increase cooperation with other countries and we attach great importance to the relationship with the UK. I believe that intensifying the bilateral relations will be beneficial to both countries.

We can see very encouraging developments in the bilateral ties. The trade volume between the two countries now exceeds US\$2 billion, the UK is the third largest EU investor in Vietnam, many British companies are present in Vietnam and the UK is one of our largest ODA donors. In addition, cooperation in the field of education is developing strongly. Cooperation on immigration and other issues is also producing effective outcomes. Nevertheless, significant economic potential is still to be developed for our mutual advantage.

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**What are your personal impressions of being a diplomat in London?**

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My feeling is, in short, a mixture of honour, pleasure and responsibility. I feel honoured to be appointed Ambassador to this important country, I feel huge responsibility for this is a very demanding post, and pleasure to live and work in a beautiful country with fantastic historical, traditional and cultural values which a diplomat should know how to enjoy.

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**The cultural and social ties between the two countries are close – what plans are in place to further enhance these?**

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On the occasion of the official visit by Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, the *Charming Vietnam* performance will be held. This is the largest Vietnamese cultural event ever held in the UK with the participation of about 100 artists and performances such as dance, singing, concert and a fashion show. At the same time, an exhibition of Vietnamese ceramic, china and paintings will be organised. In 2008 we believe that

both Vietnam and the UK should work to enhance further the introduction and promotion of each country's unique culture and image to promote tourism and increase people-to-people exchanges.

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**What is your vision for the role of Vietnam in international affairs in the medium term?**

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Thanks to the enormous achievements recorded in the past 20 years of reform and the implementation of the foreign policy based on independence, self-reliance, diversification of the external relations (in which Vietnam is a friend and a reliable partner to all countries) the prestige and role of Vietnam has been enhanced in the region and internationally. Vietnam will continue to be an active and responsible member in the international community, do its utmost to fulfil the task of a non-permanent member of the UNSC and continue to participate in and contribute to the common efforts of mankind towards peace, national independence, prosperity, democracy and social progress. 

**Vietnam will continue to be an active and responsible member in the international community**