

A strengthening partnership

Interview with H.E. TRAN NGOC AN

AMBASSADOR OF THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM TO THE UNITED KINGDOM



TRAN NGOC AN was appointed as Vietnam's Ambassador to the UK in 2017. He served most recently as Ambassador-Director General of the Department of Multilateral Economic Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of Vietnam, as well as the Vietnamese Senior Official of the Asia-Europe Meeting. Prior to that, he was Ambassador-Director General for EU Affairs at MOFA. He was also previously Ambassador to the Republic of Finland and Republic of Estonia from 2006 to 2010.

How significant is the visit of HE Pham Binh Minh in promoting the bilateral relations while the two countries celebrate the 45th Anniversary of diplomatic relations?

2018 marks the 45th Anniversary of the establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Vietnam and the UK. The official visit of Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh to the UK is among the most important events in the series of activities celebrating this memorable milestone. During the visit, the Deputy Prime Minister will be meeting senior members of the government, parliament and the Royal Family to further enhance the bilateral strategic partnership. This is a crucial period for both countries as the UK is preparing to leave the EU and is looking forwards to expand relations with other countries outside of the EU and as Vietnam continues to integrate deeper globally with an ever-expanding role.

The Deputy Prime Minister will host a reception celebrating the 45th Anniversary of Diplomatic relations, with a culturally-rich artistic performance, and an exhibition featuring national costumes and photos of the landscapes and people of Vietnam. This significant event is also an opportunity for Vietnam to showcase its culture, country and people to the locals.

The visit will certainly enhance the bilateral strategic partnership for the mutual interest of both peoples.

What are your thoughts on the bilateral relations after 45 years of engagement?

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1973, our bilateral relations have never been better with concrete positive results present in all areas of cooperation.

Politically, the two sides have maintained high ranking visits and exchanges. Vietnam's highest ranking leaders such as General Secretary, President, Prime Minister and Chairman of the National Assembly have all visited the UK, while the UK's Prime Minister, leaders of Parliament and Royal Family members have visited Vietnam on many occasions. In 2010, the two countries established a strategic partnership, paving the way for a whole new kind of cooperation mechanisms such as the Strategic Dialogue, JETCO, the Defence Working Group, which serve as a solid foundation for further relationship enhancement.

With regards to investment, the UK is currently among the top 15 largest foreign investors into Vietnam,

with approximately US\$4 billion. Despite the world's economic uncertainties, bilateral trade volumes have increased rapidly in recent years, reaching US\$6.1 billion in 2017, of which Vietnam's export account for US\$5.4 billion, an increase of 10 per cent compared to 2016 and three times compared to 2010.

In the field of education, the number of Vietnamese students studying in the UK has risen drastically. To date, there are 12,000 Vietnamese students studying at the UK's universities and colleges. Trained in one of the world's most renowned educational hubs, this high-skilled human resource will undoubtedly in the future contribute to the socio-economic development of Vietnam.

With regard to cooperation in defence, both countries have opened Defence Attaché Offices in the other's respective country. We highly appreciate the UK's support and close assistance with Vietnam's first UN troop deployment during our preparation to take over the running of a field hospital in South Sudan.

Moreover, activities aimed at introducing Vietnam's culture, people and tourist destinations have helped the people of the UK understand our country better. More and more people grow fond of authentic Vietnamese cuisine served in blossoming Vietnamese restaurants in London and other cities.

What are the prospects for the future of Vietnamese-British relations?

The potential for cooperation and development is vast. Both countries see the other as an important partner in foreign policy implementation. Given the complimentary nature of our economies, much could be done in bilateral trade and investment. Vietnam's export to the UK only accounts for 1 per cent of UK's total import volume, while the UK's investment into Vietnam only accounts for 1.5 per cent of UK's total FDI. With a market of 100 million people where the middle class is growing fast, a country with stable GDP growth rate and one of the highest in the world, Vietnam offers great potential for the UK's goods and investment. Being an international financial service and consulting centre, the UK will unquestionably have a win-win cooperation relation with Vietnam, a sustainable economy with an impressive stock market performance in recent years.

Cooperation in other areas such as scientific technology, defence and education could also be further explored. F