

EU-Vietnam Cooperation in Social Sciences and the Humanities

Notwithstanding a long history of economic, political, and cultural relations, the relationship between Vietnam and the European Union was not officially established until September 1990. As a result, cooperation between Vietnam and the EU remained somewhat limited and Vietnam was prevented from fully participating in various cooperative programmes between Asian nations and the EU.

News >
Southeast Asia

By NGUYEN Duy Quy

The cooperative relationship between Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU) was established 31 years ago. In subsequent years, this cooperation has greatly contributed to increasing mutual understanding among peoples of the member countries of both organizations, thus consolidating peace and stability and fostering the economic development of ASEAN and the EU alike.

Relying on the legal foundation of The Cooperative Agreement, signed on 17 July 1995, the cooperative relations between Vietnam and both the European Union and its individual member states have developed in all fields, including cooperation in social sciences and humanities. Upon joining ASEAN less than two weeks later, Vietnam became involved in the existing cooperation process between ASEAN and EU in many fields. Vietnam's ASEAN membership also facilitated Vietnam to join the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) afterwards. All the same, it can be said that there is still, today, some lack of understanding between Vietnam and Europe.

Hence, the National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities (NCSSH) is seeking to promote Vietnamese research on the EU and its member states. In line with this the Center for European Studies (CES), under the NCSSH umbrella, is the first and as yet only centre in Vietnam to carry out fundamental research on the EU and on Europe at large. Through its research the centre provides scientific foundations for Vietnamese policy-making towards Europe and, in particular, towards the EU, while striving to enhance the understanding about Europe and the EU among Vietnamese people.

With assistance from the European Commission, the CES is conducting a three-year programme (2002-2004) on European Studies, implemented in the two main cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. This programme aims to enhance knowledge and awareness of the EU in Vietnam by promoting European Studies in the country. A department for EU Studies will be set up as part of the CES, consisting of a team of Vietnamese researchers who are being trained to upgrade teaching and research on the EU. The centre will also contain a library and hold regular seminars, workshops, and

training courses. Activities include sending European specialists to Vietnam to lecture or to give intensive training courses, and to invite Vietnamese scholars for research stays in Europe.

Vietnam and EU member states

While the cooperation in social sciences and the humanities has just started and achieved very modest results, the cooperation between Vietnam and specific EU member states has a longer history and is now being accelerated. The National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities has already signed cooperation agreements with many Asian research centres in various EU member states. Looking back on the research cooperation in social sciences and humanities between Vietnam, as well as the NCSSH, and European partners, we may draw the following conclusions. Firstly, the results of this cooperation will not only contribute to enhance the mutual understanding between Vietnam and EU member states, but also enhance the scientific quality of many research topics, especially those related to development. Secondly, the academic cooperation in general and cooperation in social sciences and humanities research in particular between Vietnam and the EU is still not equal to the development of general relations between the two sides.

Prospects

The above results are very modest, no doubt, but they are no less a promising start for the research cooperation in the coming years. Together with other countries in East Asia, Vietnam has a long tradition in social sciences and humanities studies. Quite distinctly, social sciences and humanities in Vietnam, are also expected to provide academic foundations for determining the country's development strategies from decade to decade, especially during the renovation period. The Vietnam Government therefore attaches great importance to social sciences and humanities, and to creating the necessary conditions for their development.

On the European side, EU scholars have set up many considerable initiatives to advance cooperation in Asian Studies, such as through the founding of the European Alliance for Asian Studies, which has already attracted the participation of seven leading Asian Studies research institutes in Europe. The main question is how to best explore this potential. It is to be hoped that not only the Research General Directory of the European Council but also European social sciences and humanities scholars in general will turn their attention to this question.

For its part, the National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities will organize activities to further the cooperation between our Center and partners in Europe in the coming years. One of these will be to undertake a comprehensive research proposal on ASEM, the results of which will be published during the international conference, to be held just before ASEM 5 in Vietnam in 2004. We warmly welcome responses from European scholars to our initiative. <

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Towards a Sino-European Institute of Advanced Studies

The main characteristics of the institute could be described as follows. Situated in Beijing in the vicinity of other scientific institutions in a campus-style environment, SEIAS will be headed by a director with proven skills in scientific management, who is a mediator bringing research interests together on a Sino-European scale. The director will be supported by a small secretariat which will also assist the staff, consisting of twenty researchers working in five groups each composed of four institutionally well-connected young postdoc researchers (two from Europe and two from China). The duration of the research programmes is four to five years and the researchers will be working in a laboratory-style environment with all possible means of communication and a (electronic) library at their disposal. Working together on interrelated research programmes in a multidisciplinary and border-transcending manner, they will be able to tap into the existing resources of their extended scientific network.

At a relational level this will lead to long-lasting (scientific and personal) friendships among all participants, which will ensure a high degree of continuity in the Sino-European research endeavour. The research results are to be made public regularly through updates and electronic newsletters, while yearly high-profile

China is fast developing into an economical and political superpower. Its buying spree and voracious markets underpin the new economic growth in Asia. Its enormous potential is not only attracting foreign investment, but also adding to its political weight. China has the allure of the new and an affinity is developing between the once-feared China and the rest of Asia, and European political leaders are also courting the dragon. What is academia going to do?

This concept is both appealing and recognizable to the Chinese leadership. The convergence of the Chinese and European way of viewing the future of the world should not only be seized upon with both hands, but also be strengthened at economical, political, and scientific levels.

The establishment of a Sino-European Institute of Advanced Studies (SEIAS) in Beijing can give this rapprochement a sound scientific basis and a focal point by studying problems of relevance to both continents, such as water management, welfare systems, migration, religious tensions, disease control, genomics, influence of the media, and information technology, to name but a few. Without an analysis of the problems facing both China and Europe, a consensus on how to tackle common problems is unattainable. To facilitate the process of establishing this institute the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the IAS are in the process of establishing the Asia-Europe Academic Network

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Those institutions or persons who feel affinity with our project should not hesitate to contact us. We strongly believe that Eurasian cooperation is a precondition for the success of this project. <

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Information >

Some additional information on the National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities (NCSSH) can be found on the following web pages. Please note that these are not the Center's own:
www.cts.ne.jp/~vncenter/viet-or/NCSSH.html
http://asemconnectvietnam.gov.vn/ministries/social_sciences.htm