Vietnam is one of Russia’s oldest and most reliable partners in Asia. Friendly relations were established back in the years of the Indochina Wars of the 1950s-1970s. At that time, the Soviet Union helped Vietnamese Communists to first get rid of the French colonialists, then to defeat the Western-ruled South Vietnam, which was backed by US forces, and finally to create the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV), which exists to this day.

Despite the decline in business cooperation following the collapse of the USSR in the 1990s, Vietnam and Russia maintained friendly relations. In 1994, the Russian Federation and Vietnam signed a Treaty on the Fundamentals of Friendly Relations. In 2001, during Russian President Vladimir Putin’s visit to Vietnam, the two countries signed the Declaration on Strategic Partnership. Since then, Vietnam has remained Russia’s sole strategic partner in Southeast Asia. In his decree issued in May of 2012, the Russian President called Vietnam one of Russia’s three most important strategic partners in Asia, along with India and China. In July 2012, Russia and Vietnam declared their strategic partnership to be comprehensive.

Since then, the interaction between the two countries has continued to actively and steadily develop, especially in the spheres of politics and diplomacy. Vietnam supports the positions of the Russian Federation on key issues on the international political agenda. A high-level dialogue is ongoing between the two countries; regular visits by high-ranking politicians are held, new agreements are developed and signed.

In May 2015, the two nations signed an agreement on the creation of a free trade zone between Vietnam and the Eurasian Economic Union, in which Russia plays a key role. In October 2016, the agreement entered into force and since then, trade between the Russian Federation and Vietnam has been rapidly intensifying. In 2016 it amounted to $3.8 billion, while in 2018, the Russian-Vietnamese trade turnover exceeded $6 billion (the numbers for 2019 haven’t yet been announced).

With regard to international politics, the two countries support each other on critical issues in the UN. For Vietnam, the South China Sea problem is one of such issues. The Spratly Islands, the Paracel Islands and the Scarborough Shoal are located in this sea, and this gives rise to Vietnam’s territorial dispute with China. There is evidence that there are hydrocarbon reserves on the shelf of these islands. In addition, they are located close to the strategically important Strait of Malacca, through which over 25% of the world’s commercial sea freight travels regularly. China wishes to dominate this zone and completely secure its transportation in the area.

Russia takes a tough stand on the issue: disputes must be resolved peacefully, in accordance with international law, in particular, with the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Vietnam highly appreciates this position and, in turn, supports the Russian Federation on resolving its own pressing problems. An additional strength of the Russian-Vietnamese stance on the islands of the South China Sea is the fact that Russian companies conduct exploration and development of Vietnamese oil fields in the offshore zone.

In December 2018, a delegation of the Russian State Duma visited Vietnam and met with its Prime Minister, Nguyễn Xuân Phúc, as well as the chairman of the National Assembly of Vietnam, Nguyễn Thị Kim Ngân. They discussed issues of cooperation in the humanitarian sphere and the fields of trade and economy. It was noted that one of the promising areas of Russian-Vietnamese collaboration is tourism. In 2018, over 600,000 Russian tourists visited Vietnam, setting a new record. The participants of the meeting decided to bring this figure to 1 million by 2020.

Russia is also a popular destination for Vietnamese citizens. In Vietnam, Russian education is considered of high
2019-2020 is an important time for Russian-Vietnamese relations. In 2019, the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty on the Foundations of Friendly Relations was celebrated, and January 2020 marks 70 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the burgeoning Vietnamese state and the USSR. It is no accident that 2019 was declared the Cross Year of Russian and Vietnamese Cultures.

On 8 December 2019, the Chairman of Vietnam’s National Assembly Nguyễn Thị Kim Ngân arrived to Russia on an official visit. She met with Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, the leadership of the State Duma and the Federation Council of the Russian Federation to discuss new stages of cooperation in various fields, from politics and trade to science and security. Another goal of her visit was to participate as a co-chair in the first meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Commission of the National Assembly of Vietnam and the Russian State Duma. The purpose of the new body is to remove barriers and create a legislative framework for the successful development of Russian-Vietnamese economic and political relations. Among the main topics of the first meeting was the development of inter-parliamentary cooperation. The big news widely broadcast by the media was the proposal of the State Duma Chairman Владимир Володин, who led the meeting with Nguyễn Thị Kim Ngân. He suggested conducting Russian-Vietnamese trading operations in national currencies instead US dollars. The officials also discussed increasing Vietnamese exports to the Russian Federation and, in general, ways to increase Russian-Vietnamese trade turnover to $ 10 billion a year.

Shortly before the start of the meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Commission, Nguyễn Thị Kim Ngân said that Vietnam is threatened by economic sanctions from the United States. She said that the reason for this was the dominance of Vietnamese export in US-Vietnamese trade, which dissatisfies US President Donald Trump. Thus, redirecting part of exports to the Russian Federation and switching to national currencies can help the Vietnamese economy if Washington makes good on its threats.

From now on, meetings of the Inter-Parliamentary Commission are planned to be held annually. According to Nguyễn Thị Kim Ngân, this will help strengthen and promote the strategic partnership between the two states. The Chairman of the National Assembly of Vietnam believes that cooperation with such a powerful country as Russia will, among other things, strengthen Vietnam’s position in Southeast Asia.

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