

# Việt Nam News

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## COMMENT

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### Hungary, Việt Nam should up existing ties

On the occasion of Hungary's National Day today, the country's ambassador to Việt Nam, László Vizi, spoke to Việt Nam News.



Hungarian Ambassador to Việt Nam László Vizi.

**C**an you brief our readers on the significance of August 20 to Hungarians?

For us Hungarians August 20 is the official state celebration in memory of the founder of our state, King Saint Stephen. He was crowned king in the year 1000. Saint Stephen developed a highly centralised state administration and established the country's structure along Western European lines. Christianity, private ownership, public order and morality were protected with a series of strict laws. He did much to encourage the propagation of culture and learning, and considered it particularly important for Hungary to be fully receptive to new ideas, and tolerant of other cultures. At the time of his death in 1038, Hungary was a viable, strong and independent country.

**How important did Hungary view its accession to the European Union? How has Hungary used its EU membership to help link Việt Nam to the union?**

The EU accession was a milestone in Hungary's integration to the international community and a good reflection of our common values within the union. Considering Hungary's very open economy, and the approximately 80 per cent share of other EU member states in our total external trade, in economic terms this was a logical step without any viable alternative, even though the increased competition in the internal market is certainly a challenge domestic producers have to cope with. Another direct benefit is the amount of funds our country receives from the EU budget. However, EU membership means a lot more than free trade and funds: now Hungary is an active

participant in the whole EU agenda, including common foreign and security policy, science, research and development, employment, agriculture, infrastructure, international development co-operation, consular issues and in many other areas. These policies shape the future of the entire European Union and influence the development of the whole continent – being part of the policy-making process is a definite advantage for Hungary.

Hungary's EU membership means greater opportunities for our non-EU partners to enhance their ties with the entire union. We can now offer access to the whole EU market for our trade partners including, of course, Vietnamese exporters. With a strong commitment to the improvement of logistical services, Hungary can serve as a sort of bridgehead for entering the EU market.

**What are, in your opinion, the main directions for co-operation between Việt Nam and Hungary? What are the prospects of further development?**

We seek to further expand the presence of our traditional export items in Việt Nam, such as pharmaceutical goods, and to diversify the delivery of goods and services to include areas like waste management, infrastructure engineering services, IT solutions and technology transfer. Some of these fields could be facilitated by a US\$35 million tied aid scheme that Hungary offers to Việt Nam, the exact details of which are being currently negotiated by experts from the two sides. Our governments share the opinion that the current level of trade and investment between our countries is lagging behind the potentials.

Although the volume of bilateral trade grew by more than 20 per cent in 2006, it still amounts to only \$50-55 million per year. Both sides are investigating new possibilities for intensifying economic co-operation, and the latest developments allow for optimism. We would like to concentrate more on those high-tech areas where

Hungary has world-class expertise and that are also priorities for the sustainable development of Việt Nam. For example, communication and data security, e-Government and vaccine production. We believe that the establishment of joint ventures is probably the best way of co-operating in our age of globalisation. There is one particularly valuable asset to assist in this process: the thousands of Vietnamese people who graduated from Hungarian universities and colleges, nowadays fulfilling middle and high level managerial posts and speaking fluent Hungarian.

Currently new impetus is given to bilateral political co-operation between Hungary and Việt Nam, and we are committed to the development of this relationship in the long run. We fully support Việt Nam's bid for a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council and set great store by our regular consultation process in foreign policy matters. Việt Nam is one of the few priority partners in our official development assistance (ODA) policy. Although our possibilities are limited compared to some old EU countries with long donor traditions and with huge ODA budgets, nevertheless

Hungary is keen to adjust her development co-operation programme strictly to the needs of the Vietnamese government: in the framework of study tours some 30 delegations visited Hungary from our ODA budget since 2003, comprising experts in different fields and sectors. A highly successful Vietnamese – Hungarian Conference on Animal Production and Aquaculture for Sustainable Farming, was held at the Cơn Thơ University last week as an ODA project with more than 50 participants from Việt Nam and Hungary. We believe that our experience in the management of economic transition as well as in international integration includes valuable knowledge that we are ready to share with Việt Nam. These issues are the focus of ODA co-operation, either bilaterally or within the framework of more comprehensive EU programmes.

**What's the level of investment co-operation between the two countries?**

Promoting investment co-operation is a new area in our bilateral relations and naturally follows from the first part of my answer to the previous question. There is now a growing interest from Hungarian business circles in the Viet-

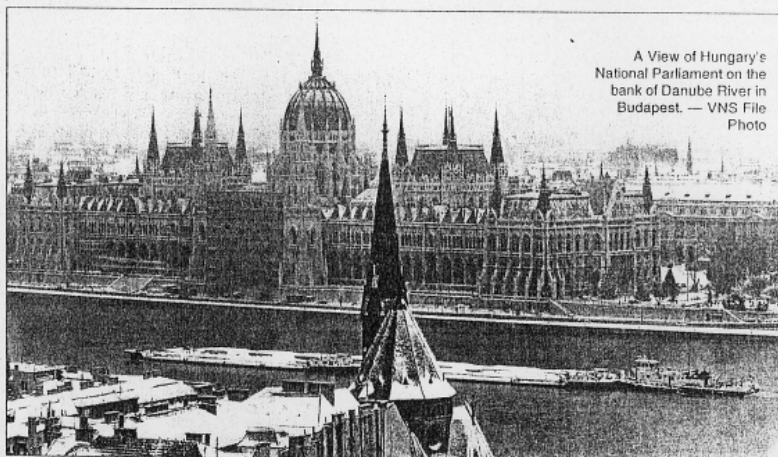
namese stock market as well as for direct investment opportunities in the service, tourism, agriculture and manufacturing sectors. It is expected that the forthcoming meeting of the Vietnamese-Hungarian Joint Economic Committee towards the end of this year will also bring to the fore promising new co-operative opportunities both in trade and investment.

**What are your personal impressions of Việt Nam?**

I am proud to be called one of the 'Asia hands' in the Hungarian MFA as all my previous foreign postings were in this continent. This (mainly South-East Asian) professional background and my recently held post as Director General of the Hungarian MFA's ODA Department made the Hà Nội ambassadorial post a very logical choice for me. I personally appreciate this assignment because in the course of my ten previous visits here I got very much attached to this beautiful country and its people. I have kept coming back regularly here since 1984 and witnessed the truly remarkable success of Việt Nam. Whatever institution I visit here I meet people who speak Hungarian and are passionate about developing our bilateral ties. — VNS

#### HUNGARY AT A GLANCE:

|                |                      |
|----------------|----------------------|
| Area:          | 93,030 sq km         |
| Population:    | over 9.9 million     |
| Capital:       | Budapest             |
| Language:      | Hungarian            |
| Currency:      | florint              |
| National Flag: | red, white and green |



A View of Hungary's National Parliament on the bank of Danube River in Budapest. — VNS File Photo