

OPENING REMARKS

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Politburo Member, President of Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics
Chairman of the Central Theoretical Council
at the 2nd Vietnam-Australia Forum

Senator the Hon Sue Lines, President of the Australian Senate,

Mme Nguyen Thi Thanh, Vice Chairwoman of the National Assembly of Vietnam,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Today, in the atmosphere of the autumn days of August in Hanoi, which are associated with the important historical events of the Vietnamese people and nation, Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics is honoured to welcome Senator the Hon Sue Lines, international guests, and distinguished delegates to the second Vietnam-Australia Forum with the theme: “*Enhancing Economic Engagement – A Shared Vision for Prosperity.*”

This is a meaningful event that took place after Vietnam and Australia upgraded their relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, marking a new milestone and making Australia and Vietnam one of each other’s most important partners. Over the 50 years since Vietnam and Australia established diplomatic relations, overcoming many challenges and difficulties, we are witnessing rapid and significant changes that have brought about remarkable achievements in the relationship between the two countries.

Few could have imagined that, from a poor, backward, closed-off country where people faced numerous hardships, today Vietnam has become the 35th largest economy in the world in terms of GDP, is a middle-income country with a modern-oriented industry, and follow a diplomatic line of independence, autonomy, openness, multilateralisation, and diversification with comprehensive international integration. Vietnam is a friend, a reliable partner, and a responsible member of the global community. Never before, has Vietnam had the stature, potential, international position, and prestige that it enjoys today.

Meanwhile, thanks to economic reforms and sound development policies over the past decades, Australia has successfully built a prosperous and resilient economy that is increasingly closely connected with Asian countries. As the homeland of some of the world’s oldest cultures, Australia is continuously building and strengthening its social and demographic foundations based on diversity, openness, and inclusiveness. These pillars foster innovation and the values of respect, understanding, and connection, allowing Australia to adapt to the rapid changes of the world and seize new development opportunities

At this forum, I would like to highlight three stories of significant and deeply humanistic changes that Vietnam and Australia have written together over the past 50 years,

especially since Vietnam embarked on the “Doi Moi” process (economic renovation process).

First, the story of the “first partner”.

Australia was the first developed industrial country to officially establish diplomatic relations with Vietnam right after the Paris Peace Accords were signed. That was a historic beginning, laying the foundation for many other beginnings, and today, when we look back, we are proud to say:

Australia was the first foreign investor in Vietnam after the Law on Foreign Investment was enacted. The Australian telecommunications company (now Telstra) supported the first undersea cable to enable the first direct international call from Vietnam. ANZ was the first international bank in Vietnam and the first to introduce ATMs in Vietnam. RMIT was the first foreign university established in Vietnam. Phillips Fox (now Allens) was the first foreign law firm set up in Vietnam.

Australian experts supported Vietnam in designing the first 500kV North-South ultra-high voltage transmission line, an essential energy infrastructure during the early years of Doi Moi. The Australian ODA contributed to the construction of the My Thuan Bridge, the first cable-stayed bridge over the Tien River, opening roads, enabling connectivity and development, and creating momentum for the growth of the Mekong Delta region.

Following these positive beginnings, today, Vietnam has established diplomatic relations with all United Nations member states, developed trade relations with 230 foreign markets, and signed FTAs with 60 economies. Vietnam has become an attractive destination for foreign investors and developed a telecommunications and energy system that is being continuously modernised. Each year, more than 130,000 Vietnamese young people go abroad to study, with Australia being one of their top choices. In the Mekong Delta, new cable-stayed bridges continue to be inaugurated, but they are now designed and constructed by Vietnamese engineers and workers. Such bridges will help connect the Southwestern region with Ho Chi Minh City and the entire country, gradually realising the dream of Vietnam becoming a “dragon”. We have also successfully launched the Vietnam-Australia Centre, an initiative proposed by the Prime Ministers of Vietnam and Australia, to continue building a bridge of knowledge and promoting people-to-people exchanges between the two countries.

So to speak, many of these first events are certainly not serendipity but rather the result of relentless pioneering efforts and strategic vision, building up together a “heart-to-heart” relationship, as Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh put it. I hope that we will continue to have more of such beginnings and pioneering efforts, creating more momentum to elevate the relationship between the two countries to new heights.

Secondly, the story of “two companion countries”.

The establishment of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership has ushered in a new chapter in the Vietnam-Australia relationship, with increasingly substantive, effective, comprehensive, and sustainable cooperation in various fields, meeting the aspirations and practical interests of the people of both countries. This is a model of cooperation between two countries that are playing increasingly important roles in the East Asia-Indo-Pacific region, aimed at promoting strategic interests and strategic autonomy through both bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

From resource-intensive economies, both Australia and Vietnam are now committed to achieving net-zero emissions and are putting efforts to implement green transition and energy transition strategies. This forms the basis for closer cooperation in the fields of climate change, environment, energy, and resources, becoming a new pillar, a prominent highlight, and an important driving force in the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries.

As responsible members of the international community, Vietnam and Australia both value a culture of dialogue and cooperation, building trust and preventing conflict, and respecting the role of international law and multilateralism in addressing common challenges, protecting people, and ensuring inclusive access so that no one is left behind in the development process. Both countries oppose coercive actions and desire to peacefully resolve disputes by international law. The two countries share an interest in maintaining peace, stability, security, safety, and freedom of navigation and aviation in the East Sea; and in promoting ASEAN's central and bridging role in creating an open dialogue and cooperation network, building a peaceful, stable, resilient, and prosperous region. We also speak highly of the substantial developments in security and defence cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the implementation of United Nations peacekeeping activities.

In the context of a world and region undergoing complex and multifaceted changes, I hope that the Vietnam-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership will not only be a typical bilateral relationship but also become a "success story", a model that spreads the message of restoring and strengthening strategic trust, sincerity, and mutual respect in international relations, making positive contributions to peace, stability, democracy, cooperation, inclusive and sustainable development.

Thirdly, the story of "two close friends".

Recently, Vietnam and Australia have effectively implemented the 2020-2023 Action Program and the Enhanced Economic Cooperation Program to 2025, gradually making trade and investment cooperation a bright spot in the relationship between the two countries. Both Vietnam and Australia are among each other's top 10 trading partners. Two-way trade in 2023 reached USD 13.8 billion, double the amount from 10 years ago. Both countries have

established increasingly close cooperation, particularly in the production of strategic goods. Australia continues to be one of Vietnam's leading ODA partners.

Australia is also consistently among the top 15 destinations for Vietnamese tourists. The Vietnamese community in Australia now numbers around 350,000 people, making positive contributions to Australia's socio-economic development and serving as an important bridge of friendship, enhancing mutual understanding in culture, society, and economic cooperation between the two countries.

Science and technology are becoming an important pillar of cooperation between the two countries. There are ever-more scientific, technological, and innovative cooperation initiatives between businesses, universities, and research institutions in Vietnam and Australia. The initiatives are bringing about mutual benefits and promoting diversity, inclusion, gender equality, and digital transformation, energy transition, and so on, and ultimately becoming strategic priorities and key drivers in the relationship between the two countries.

We highly value the Australian government's strong emphasis on developing relations with Southeast Asia, recognising the central role and position of ASEAN in general and Vietnam in particular. This is clearly reflected in the Southeast Asia Economic Strategy 2040, with numerous specific measures and recommendations to promote investment and trade exchanges between Australia and ASEAN, including Vietnam.

However, the potential for promoting economic relations between Vietnam and Australia remains enormous. Both economies have untapped strengths that complement each other. Investment and trade relations have not yet fully matched the scale, openness, and regional linkages of the two economies, particularly with the high level of political trust between the two countries. We hope that Australia will once again become one of the top foreign investors in Vietnam in the coming years. As close friends, Australia will continue to accompany Vietnam in seizing new development opportunities; cooperating in pioneering fields such as artificial intelligence, fintech, and high-tech agriculture; training human resources for high-tech sectors and high-level management; accelerating digital transformation, green and energy transitions; and opening new chapters in the relationship between the two countries.

Distinguished guests,

The Vietnam-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership is a well-deserved achievement of the tremendous efforts made over the past 50 years, aligned with the needs, interests, and shared aspirations of both countries. From being the first partners to becoming companions and two close friends, Vietnam and Australia have been writing a "new story" which is remarkable, profound, and a typical example of a friendship that has grown out of sincerity, trust, good will, knowledge and mutual respect as well as a shared vision and confidence of a stable, peaceful and prosperous East Asia-Indo-Pacific region.

Today's forum is an opportunity for us to deepen the significance of the Vietnam-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership; reflect on the 40 years of Vietnam's Doi Moi process as a foundation for charting directions to further promote Vietnam-Australia relations in the future; realise the development visions of both countries; and make positive contributions to peace, cooperation, and development in the region and the world.

With that importance and significance, I would like to declare the opening of the second Vietnam-Australia Forum 2024.

I wish Senator the Hon Sue Lines, the ambassadors, representatives of international organisations, and all distinguished delegates good health and happiness!

May the forum be a great success!

Thank you very much!