

EU entry Czechs' most important milestone

On the occasion of the Czech Republic's National Day, Việt Nam News spoke with the country's ambassador to Việt Nam, Ivo Zdarek.

Becoming a member of the European Union and Asia-Europe Meeting is a major landmark in the Czech Republic's history. Does it provide the Czech people additional cause to celebrate National Day?

The entry into the European Union is one of the most important milestones for the whole Czech society. Our preparations for the accession to the EU had lasted for over a decade and the process had certainly been neither fast nor easy.

It opens the largest internal market worldwide for new member-countries, providing scope for the free movement of goods, services, persons and capital. It offers opportunities to increase FDI and reduces investment risks. Each new member is obliged to adopt the entire legal order of the Community and accept the different common policies. This, to some extent, limits independence and national identity in the very historical sense of these words. On the other hand, by placing great emphasis on the legal order, the EU offers new members a boost to their own legal framework. The Czech entrepreneurs will be operating in the united market. The domestic legal environment will be fully harmonised with standards of the European Community.

Therefore, I see the Czech Republic's admission to ASEM as one of the natural follow-ups of its work inside the EU administrative, political and economic structures.

I am sure that these two significant and extraordinary events will become additional causes to celebrate this year's National Day.

What advantages and disadvantages do you think accrue for the Czech Republic as a new member of the ASEM? How does this affect its ties with Việt Nam?

I am truly convinced our ASEM membership will only have a positive impact on our bilateral and



Czech Ambassador to Việt Nam, Ivo Zdarek

multilateral relations. I hope my country [enters into] more fruitful and accelerated co-operation with all Asian member-states. It paves the way for frequent meetings between Czech politicians, business people and citizens and their Asian counterparts. The forum widens the opportunity for each participating state to influence, support and enhance the mainstream of the political, economic, cultural and humanitarian reciprocity between the two continents.

Our ASEM membership will enrich our traditional and long-lasting friendship. This mutual co-operation will further strengthen Việt Nam's position in Czech foreign policy. Besides, Việt Nam is considered one of the most important trading and economic partners of my country in Southeast Asia.

How do you assess Việt Nam's organisation of ASEM 5? Will it pave way for the country to host more international summits?

I assess the organisation of ASEM 5 as successful. It fully corresponds to the general development of the Vietnamese society. It is a proof that your country is able to organise and manage big and very logistically challenging conferences. It is a good advertisement for your country abroad. But the most important pre-condition for that kind of event is security. And I saw that Hà Nội had provided everything. Simply, I foresee a very bright future for "conference tourism" not only in Hà Nội, but also in other cities in Việt Nam.

You have been in office in Việt Nam

for a couple of months. Could you share with our readers your initial impressions?

I have been impressed by its far-reaching process of modernisation. Việt Nam is becoming very popular among investors, business people and foreign tourists. It has magnificent sites to visit, attractive locations to invest in and very kind people to meet. Its pace of socio-economic development is simply astonishing.

When you look around the capital city, it is apparent the country and its economy are developing in many ways. I am amazed by the diligence of the local people and convinced Việt Nam should serve as an example for other developing countries.

To all Czechs, Việt Nam is very close and a well-known destination. Our two countries have enjoyed warm and friendly bilateral relations since the 1950s. One of the most valuable assets of mutual relations is a Vietnamese community living and working in my country. Those people are real and effective pillars for understanding, recognition and co-operation between the two nations.

Where do Czech-Việt Nam economic and trade ties stand at the moment? Are you satisfied with the progress?

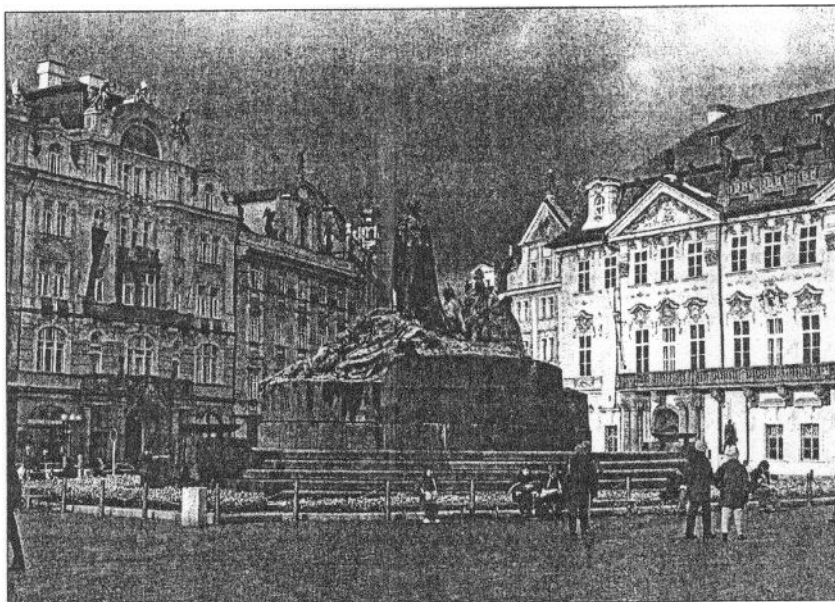
Economic co-operation between the Czech Republic and Việt Nam has a long tradition and is based on integration of both economies into international economic structures. The main Czech export commodities are machinery products, tools, glassware, milk powder, pharmaceuticals and medical equipment. Việt Nam exports mostly clothing, footwear, rubber and food-stuffs (rice, coffee, instant soups). The volume of economic exchange amounted to US\$72.9 million (with Czech exports being \$19.2 million and Vietnamese exports \$53.7 million) in 2003. However, this volume still does not match the potential of

traditional commercial ties. We expect that the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union this year will contribute to the enhancement of economic and trade relations with Việt Nam.

Czech companies have been participating in the significant Việt Nam International Industrial Fair for the past seven years, establishing promising contacts with a number of business partners. The fact that Czech companies are present at this year's fair again with the biggest exhibition till now, shows the lasting interest in co-operation with Vietnamese partners in this area, as well as in development of economic and trade relations on the basis of mutual respect and to the benefit of both countries. — VNS

CZECH REPUBLIC AT A GLANCE

Area:	78,886 sq.km
Population:	10.3 million
Language:	Czech
Capital:	Prague
Currency:	Korun
National flag:	White over red horizontally with a blue triangle extending from the hoist to the centre of the flag.



The centre of the country's capital city, Prague. — VNS File Photo

TODAY IN HISTORY

- 1492 Christopher Columbus discovers Cuba and claims it in the name of Spain.
- 1627 The Mogul emperor of India, Jahangir, dies on his way to Lahore. Emperor from 1605, he was famed for his patronage of the arts.
- 1636 Harvard University is founded at Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- 1746 The Peruvian cities of Lima and Callao are demolished by an earthquake, killing at least 18,000.
- 1818 Birth of Russian writer Ivan Turgenev (died 1883). His collection of stories, *A Sportsman's Sketches*, contributed toward the emancipation of the serfs. His novels, such as *Fathers and Children*, are eloquent portrayals of the ineffectual Russian gentry.
- 1836 Federation of Peru and Bolivia is proclaimed.
- 1886 The Statue of Liberty, a gift from France designed by Auguste Bartholdi, is dedicated to President Grover Cleveland.
- 1891 An earthquake strikes the Nippon Islands in Japan,

- killing 10,000 people and leaving at least 300,000 homeless.
- 1909 Francis Bacon is born in Dublin. He became one of Britain's most important painters and was first noted for his *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* in 1945.
- 1914 Birth of US microbiologist Jonas Edward Salk who developed the first polio vaccine in 1953.
- 1918 The Czechoslovak state comes into being with the Prague national committee taking over land upon the dissolution of Austria-Hungary. The Republic was declared in November 1918 under President Masaryk.
- 1922 Fascist march on Rome from Naples. Two days later a fascist government was formed under Benito Mussolini.
- 1940 Italian forces under Mussolini cross into Greece from Albania in an attempt to occupy the country.
- 1946 President Hồ Chí Minh signs a decision promulgating Việt Nam's first Constitution.
- 1965 The South Việt Nam liberation forces attack the US air bases of Chu Lai and Nước Mặn respectively in Quảng Nam and Đà Nẵng, central Việt Nam, inflicting 600 casualties and destroying over 160 aircraft.

- 1971 The British House of Commons votes in favour of England's joining the European Economic Community.
- 1982 The Spanish Socialist Workers' Party led by Felipe Gonzalez wins a landslide victory in a general election.
- 1994 Representatives of the Irish Republican Army meet with representatives of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to discuss peace for the first time since violence erupted 25 years earlier.
- 1995 Some 289 people die and 270 are injured when a crowded underground railway train catches fire in Azerbaijan's capital Baku.
- 1998 Hurricane Mitch pauses over Honduras with 205kph winds, sweeping away bridges, flooding neighbourhoods and killing hundreds of people.
- 1999 Luis Alfredo Garavito, known as "Goofy," confesses to killing some 140 children during a seven-year orgy of bloodshed in Colombia's biggest-ever serial murder case.
- 2001 US President George W. Bush announces creation of a Foreign Terrorist Tracking Task Force to find and deport foreigners who are in the United States illegally. — AP/REUTERS/VNS