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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY BETWEEN BELARUS AND VIETNAM: CURRENT SITUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of international labor exchange, international cooperation in science and technology (S&T) is an important form of international economic relations.

Belarus and Vietnam have undergone a longtime partnership since the Soviet time. Recently, Belarus and Vietnam have strengthened cooperation in S&T. Based on various documents from governmental and ministerial level like agreements, protocols, and so forth. Cooperation is often in the form of information exchange, seminars, and forums result-presentation or joint research activities in the fields of science and technology transfer.

1. The necessity to strengthen S&T cooperation between Belarus and Vietnam.

Belarus and Vietnam has a longtime partnership with big support and cooperation in S&T. This relationship, however, reached an impasse due to the Collapse of the Soviet Union. In recent years, the unfolding of global and regional context has tended to change Belarus's foreign policy. Belarus government recognizes the need for economic integration into regions and the world, of which S&T integration is a vital link. Of many regions, the Asia-Pacific, including Vietnam is growing exponentially and playing an increasingly important role in the world economy.

With years of mutual understanding, Vietnam is a crucial bridge to help Belarus penetrate ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific region. As a result, the two-sided impetus benefits not only Vietnam but Belarus as well. The bilateral cooperation deriving from two countries' aspiration and equal benefits will indeed run in a smooth and proper way.

Secondly, Vietnam and Belarus are traditional partners. To Jan 2017, the two countries have shared 25 years of diplomatic relationship. Better still, Vietnam has signed free trade agreements with The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), of which Belarus is a pillar. The Union, by large effort, is now working out to build a joint S&T space.

Thirdly, after a period of economic reform, Belarus with available resources in S&T has made encouraging progress in S&T and gained advantages over other countries in some particular fields to provide products at lower cost and quality that is as equally good as the American and European counterparts. Cooperation with Belarus will enable Vietnam to adopt new and appropriate technologies through other channels.

Fourthly, based on the foundation of mutual beneficial benefit and comparative advantage of both partners, the cooperation is an interactive

and two-way process. On the one hand, Vietnam attracts scientific knowledge and Belarusian advanced technologies for country development. On the other hand, Vietnam can bring its technology and scientific products to foreign markets. Belarus will be a bridge for Vietnam to promote science and technology products not only to Belarus but other countries in the Eurasian Economic Union as well.

Finally, Belarus and Vietnam share many common aspects. Both are transition economies and fall to select and implement appropriate models that maximize the effectiveness of international cooperation. Therefore, in the course of cooperation, Vietnam can learn not only from the experience of Belarus in planning and implementing S&T development and innovation policies but also the shortcomings that Belarus has encountered.

2. Current situation of S&T cooperation between Belarus and Vietnam.

Belarus-Vietnam S&T cooperation has been put into action in various areas and forms. From 2000–2012, based on the bilateral protocols and agreement, 15 research topics at institute level were conducted with one social science research and the rest focus on electronics, new materials, aviation, and informatics, mechanics. In 2011, ten basic research projects were carried out together on the basis of Agreement between Belarus Foundation of Fundamental Research and the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology.

Besides, Belarusian Hi-Tech Park and Saigon Hi-Tech Park did sign a cooperation agreement. In 2012, the Belarusian Technical University and the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of the Center for Scientific and Technological Cooperation Support between Vietnam and Belarus. At present, the Vietnam-Belarus Technology Innovation Training Center has been established with two sub-branches: one in Binh Duong province of Vietnam at University of Binh Duong and VC invest Company. The other locates in Belarus at the Technical University of Belarus. Currently, there are four big and long-term S&T projects from the Technical University of Belarus that Vietnam is in favor of.

By the end of 2014, Vietnam had a total of 16 collaborative projects with Belarus, ranking number sixth. Among of them, ten are from the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology, five stems from the Ministry of Education and one from the Ministry of Construction. From 2015 to 2016, no projects are formally recorded. In recent years, the priority of S&T cooperation between the two countries has been directed to IT, vehicles and diesel engines, electronic wallet, new material, exploiting and processing oil, biotechnology and medicine.

Some S&T organization of Vietnam and Belarus have given birth to several cooperation models in the form of centers such as the Center for Science and Technology Cooperation at the Information Department Technology in Vietnam and Minsk Polytechnic University. However, according to Mr. Andrei Symonchyk, one of the founders, the Center is now hibernating due to limited funding and no generating revenue activities from

the center. Despite the popularity in signing agreements with foreign countries, and with Vietnam in particular, these agreements seldom work probably. It is common that such types of centers exist on documents only.

In comparison with the neighboring Russian, Belarus cooperation in S&T with Vietnam remains low. By the end of 2014, only 16 Belarus-Vietnam bilateral projects were implemented whereas the number reached over 50 for Russia, among of which are ten humanities and social science projects, and not to mention projects conducted under the funding of Vietnam-Russia Research Foundation.

There are various reasons to explain for the bilateral cooperation setback. First, after the Collapse of the Soviet Union, both Vietnam and Belarus have undergone the economic reform and changed their foreign policy accordingly, including S&T international cooperation. As a result, two countries have become strange yet familiar partners under the mutually beneficial benefit cooperation mechanisms with a limited budget for this activity. International exposing and deep integrating to the world have enabled Vietnam more access to the advanced technologies of Western nations. Belarus has high potentials for S&T, but national promotion activities fall to execute effectively. Still, Belarusian S&T organizations have not quickly adapted to the market mechanism. Those entire shifts result to an invisible barrier preventing Vietnam and Belarus from promoting science and technology.

Secondly, although the legal basis for S&T cooperation is established mutually, this relationship is ranked medium. According to the survey conducted by the authors on the need to cooperate with Belarus counterpart, 75 % companies and 54 % S&T organizations evaluated the conformity level of the legal basis on average. 20 % of organizations and 2,5 % of enterprises surveyed were satisfied with the level. The rest of the respondents rated the current legal basis at low and very low level. Third, information shortage and difficulties in finding partners are significant obstacles that cause shortcomings in bilateral S&T cooperation. As stated by enterprises and S&T organization in the survey, nearly 80 % of organizations and more than 50 % of businesses in Vietnam agree (that) the above reasons are to blame for. They are the obstacles that hinder high-level cooperation between two countries.

Fourthly, the lack of budget to finance S&T cooperation activities also hampers the bilateral cooperation in S&T. The fact that many S&T cooperation centers were established but now have no budget to run is a black and white illustration. Worse still, many cooperative activities are nominal actions. As a consequence of finance shortage, many promotion activities are not regularly and synchronously organized to increase the market access possibility of S&T organizations and companies. Finally, assorted reasons like language, cultures, entry and exit barriers, the visa regime and fees are accounted for this current cooperation.

3. Some recommendations.

To provide a sound basis for suggestions, the authors conducted an interview with 200 science and technology organizations and companies in

Vietnam about the need for cooperation. The results are quite positive with 100 % of the respondents expressed their wish to cooperate with Belarusian partners in S&T. 19,27 % of them wanted to work cooperatively in the form of expert exchange. The identical number of participant wished for the exchange of information, and 19 % of interviewees desired to implement projects together. 18,8 % of the survey organizations hope for co-organize a scientific workshop. Cooperation in the form of technology transfer is reported with 7,5 % of the respondents. Considering the nature of S&T's function and duties, this number does make sense. Meanwhile, in the business sectors, 28,9 % of surveyed enterprises wants to cooperate in the form of technology transfer with Belarus. 19 % and 24 % out of the interviewed companies prefer information exchange and project implementation respectively.

As mentioned above, one of the barriers to cooperate is of immigration, especially, visa for Vietnamese scientists to Belarus. The Vietnamese government has waived visas within 15 days for Belarusian citizens. From February 12, 2017, Belarus waived a five-day visa for Vietnamese citizens. However, the five-day limit is quite short for market exploration and cooperative opportunities seeking. Consequently, Belarus should loosen travel restriction for Vietnamese scientists and businesspeople to promote cooperation in science and technology.

Currently, Vietnam and Belarus are members of the FTA between Vietnam and the Eurasian Economic Union. This situation will open up a prospect of trade cooperation in general and science and technology in particular for Vietnam and other member countries, including Belarus. With comparative advantages of each country, it is feasible for Vietnam and Belarus to cooperate effectively in the field of science and technology which, in turns, will promote economic cooperation and form a firm foundation for each country's economic development.

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