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Viet Nam takes part in preparations for World Social Forum 2004

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Bombay, June 6, 2003 (VNA) - Hoang Thinh, Vice President of the Viet Nam Committee for Afro-Asian-Latin American Solidarity and Cooperation, has conveyed Viet Nam's views vis-a-vis Asian and European values, Asian values and EU-ASEAN relations to the preparations for the World Social Forum 2004.

At the Asia Consultation for the World Social Forum 2004 held in Mumbai (Bombay), India recently, Thinh delivered an address, which said: Concerning the role of Asian values, for a long time, the world's renowned ideologists, sociologists and humanists have been attached to the differences between the Occidental and Oriental cultures, of which the values play a key role.

Together with the incredible advances of Japan, and later of the "Asian tigers", people not only spoke of the differences of the economies, but also emphasised the role of Asian values, considering them an impetus, and even the prime important factor, to the unexpected and marvellous development in Asia over the past decades.

Over the past few years, both Occidental and Oriental scientists have not only paid attention to, but also deeply researched and identified the Asian values and their impetus in socio-economic development, helping discover the Oriental potential.

The same has happened in Viet Nam, and it could be said that the Asian values became positive factors to promote research of the role of culture in development. The relations between tradition and modernity in particular started a hot debate. Viet Nam is a multi-cultural country with, first of all, the mixture between the East Asian and Southeast Asian cultures, then the Indian and Chinese cultures; the Asian and European cultures in modern times; and recently the socialist and capitalist cultures.

The Vietnamese people do not accept that there is an absolute opposition between Asian and European values. We stand firmly on our land to preserve the national identity while receiving the values of mankind, from both Asia and Europe. Vis-a-vis Asian and European values, the Vietnamese people forever remember Ho Chi Minh's immortal words: *"Vietnamese culture is a blend of Oriental and Occidental cultures. Whatever good the Orient or Occident has, we should learn from it to create a Vietnamese culture"*.

Immediately after its foundations in 1967, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was recognised by the European Union (then known as the European Economic Community, EEC). In March 1980, both parties signed the EEC-ASEAN Cooperation Agreement to speed up cooperation. EEC-ASEAN relations witnessed encouraging steps of development after that. Since the end of the 80s, these relations evolved qualitatively, gradually shifting from a donor - recipient relationship to a partnership. The subsequent intention of the European Union (EU) to upgrade its relationship with Asia, including ASEAN, and increase its presence in this region, has been expressed in the document

“Towards a New Asia Strategy”.

In their research on Asia and the “Age of Asia and the Pacific”, people all recognise that, in spite of cultural diversity in the region, there remains a common view that cultural factors have accelerated the economic development and prosperity of Asia. It is the cultural foundation that has contributed to alleviating poverty and creating an impetus to regional economic development.

East Asian countries have all achieved a high rate of economic growth since 1950s and for some it has developed explosively over the past decade.

In Asia there are many different religions, including Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism (understood as a religion), Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Among them, one can realise that Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism remain the three major creeds in East Asia, having the most affect on countries in the region, ranging from Japan to the Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore.

Christianity has had positive impacts on the process of East Asian economic development, but with no great cultural influences on the whole region.

Taoism is concerned about naturalism and encourages the tendency to escape reality. It lacks social character and denies political thoughts and principles for societal structure. As such, no modern economy can rely solely on pure Taoism.

Buddhism exerts much of its influence on the spiritual culture of East Asia. The Buddhist theory is esteemed with high values, but it teaches human beings to disdain materialistic life, fame and wealth. For that reason, Buddhism also does not support ideas related to economic development.

Since its appearance, Confucianism has been imbued with Asian political thought. It supports principles to organise the society and educate human beings by emphasis on ethical and moral norms. On the basis of practical principles and ethics, it builds up moral rules to be applied to practical life and closely connected to the stability of a concrete political regime. Different from Taoism and Buddhism, Confucianism highlights political thoughts and ideas for the organising of society. For this reason, it supports a pattern of social order necessary for economic development.

In its history of development, Vietnamese legal ideologies were not only influenced by Oriental legal ideologies - i.e. laws and ideologies of ancient, feudal China - they were equally influenced by Western legal ideologies from the French colonisation and rule over Viet Nam in the 19th century.

The Viet Nam Declaration of Independence (1945) began with the affirmed values of the US Declaration of Independence and the Declaration on human and civil rights by the French bourgeois revolution:

“All men are created equal, they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness”.

These human values were acquired and brought to a new height: “Right to equality”, “right to life”, “right of nations to live happily and freely”. In Ho Chi Minh’s ideology, the basic rights of men should be further elevated and assured by the basic rights of national independence and self-determination. The truth of “nothing is more precious than independence and freedom” in Ho Chi Minh’s ideology was the summing up of the historical values and of the Vietnamese nation in its long history to freedom and independence.

The same truth can also be generalised for the 20th century’s movement for national liberation in the world. It was not only a Vietnamese constitutional platform, a Vietnamese value; it was a universal

value of mankind as well.

The process of development of a market economy in Viet Nam had, on different levels, integrated Viet Nam's socio-economic life in that of the region, an integration of Viet Nam's law step by step to the regional and international legal life.

At any rate, Western or Oriental values cannot substitute Vietnamese values. They merely constitute as precious supplements to our own efforts in building up a Vietnamese legal system, making it both modern and national. It is a tradition of many Asian countries, including Viet Nam, to combine patriotism and national consciousness with the spirit of humanity and a tolerant and open attitude, as they have gone beyond narrow-minded nationalism, doctrinal discrimination and religious discrimination, which were a result of the past situation when they had to face constant foreign schemes for the annihilation. End.