

**Opening Remarks**  
**EuroCham Vice-Chairman Jean Jacques Bouflet**

Dear Mr. Hoang Hong Giang, Deputy Director of Vinamarine,

Distinguished guests and honourable colleagues from Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Industry and Trade, Vietnamese enterprises, universities, associations, EuroCham members attending in this conference room and also via online meeting,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am Jean-Jacques Bouflet, Vice-Chairman of the European Chamber of Commerce in Vietnam. First of all, I would to thank Vietnam Maritime Administration and the Ministry of Transport for the great initiative and kind hosting of this event today at the premises of Vinamarine. This is such an honour for EuroCham to be here this morning alongside such distinguished guests to speak and share EuroCham's perspective on the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement and proceed with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between EuroCham and Vinamarine.

We meet this morning just hours before the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement enters into force on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2020. This momentous occasion has been a long time coming – and I speak as a former EU civil servant and one of the negotiators on the EU side of the EVFTA.

So I can state with some confidence that EuroCham has supported the EVFTA ever since talks first began. Over the last decade, our chamber has advocated for this agreement at each stage of the process: Sharing the insights and recommendations of our Sector Committees throughout 14 rounds of negotiation; holding countless events in Vietnam with the Government and other stakeholders from the national to the provincial level; and making trips to Europe with our members to persuade first the European Commission and then Members of the European Parliament of the benefits of this historic free trade agreement.

This long process of ratification came to an end when Vietnam's National Assembly voted in favour of the EVFTA ratification on 8 of, following an earlier positive vote in the European Parliament in Strasbourg in February. And I am pleased to report that our efforts have been appreciated: Both the EU's Trade Commissioner Mr Phil Hogan and Vietnam's First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Bui Thanh Son have written to thank EuroCham for our efforts in promoting the EVFTA.

The EVFTA is a strong vote of confidence in Vietnam from the European Union. The fact that this is just the second FTA agreed with an ASEAN member state shows the high regard with which the EU holds Vietnam, its positive record of reform, and its strategic importance in Asia.

But, on a practical level, this historic free trade agreement matters to our members. I will discuss the detail of the deal later on. But, for now, I would like to highlight that in a poll conducted before the EVFTA had been ratified, 74 per cent of European business leaders said that the agreement would have

a positive impact on their business operations in the short-term. Over the long-term, that figure rises to over 90 per cent.

Of course, the EVFTA will benefit all sectors and industries. However, it will be of particular importance to maritime trade – since an increased trade in goods cannot happen without transport networks, supply chains, and logistics infrastructure; or, indeed, without the companies who facilitate them.

Now, with the EVFTA set to enter into force on 1 August, the relationship between our two sides will grow stronger than ever. This morning's event will, no doubt, be the first of many as we seek to unlock the full potential of this historic free trade agreement and build stronger bridges through trade, investment, and co-operation.

EuroCham and its Sector Committees, including the Transport and Logistics Sector Committee, look forward to discussing the importance of the EVFTA to Vietnam's maritime sector this morning. I also look forward to learning more about the perceptions of Vinamarine towards this new chapter in EU-Vietnam trade, and what it means in practical terms for Vietnam's maritime enterprises as well as upcoming opportunities and challenges for the marine service industry. I also hope that, together, we can reach towards the common goals to provide a framework for cooperation in areas like: supporting the understanding and implementation of the EVFTA in the fields of maritime and sea freight of Vietnamese enterprises and European investors operating in Vietnam.

Last but not least, we are particularly eager to bring our support to help Vinamarine in assisting Vietnamese enterprises, especially those providing port, transportation – logistics services, to develop the connection with Europe.