

**WELCOME SPEECH OF
H.E BELGIAN AMBASSADOR, Mr. KARL VAN DEN BOSSCHE**

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the Webinar “Benefits from the EVFTA: How to use Brussels services to access the EU market” organized by the Brussels Agency for Business Support- hub.brussels.

As a reliable and stable partner in the ASEAN region, Vietnam has been given access to European markets in order to allow it to rise in international economic growth statistics. The EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement has been in operation for the recent few years and shows its benefits. Currently, the European Union represents Vietnam's primary trading partner and third-largest export market, boasting an average annual export growth rate of 7.5%. Vietnam's goods exports to the EU have experienced substantial growth, accounting for an average share of 13.6% of the country's total export turnover from 2015 to 2021. Moreover, these exports have witnessed a positive shift, with many key products showing promising growth.

Bilateral trade between Vietnam and the EU has reached \$62.2 billion in 2022, representing a growth of 20% compared to 2020. I see many key export products of Vietnam have experienced growth since the agreement took effect, including iron and steel of all kinds (up 86%), machinery and equipment (up 51%), pepper (up 43%), rice, footwear, coffee, textiles, and seafood up more than 30%.

Currently, the market share of Vietnam's goods in the EU's total imports from the EU market accounts for 1.8%, which is higher than other Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia (1.2%), Thailand (0.9%), Indonesia (0.7%), and Singapore (0.7%).

For Belgium, we see a structural trade deficit with Vietnam: 1.8 billion EUR in 2021 and about 1.4 billion EUR in 2022. While the trade volumes are up, they seem to flow in one direction. There might be a simple explanation: Belgium is the Gateway to Europe and has a super-diversified economy which is open to the world. Belgium always welcomes third countries and tries to find the best ways to cooperate.

A small example of this. Did you know that Nike has its main European distribution warehouse near Antwerp in Flanders? And that Vietnam exports mostly footwear to Belgium? Together, Belgium and Vietnam make the Europeans run!

As the seat of the EU, Brussels is known as the “capital of Europe,” Its significance as a center of international governance and business makes Brussels a truly global city. Our capital has become home to all nationalities of the world! The economy of Brussels is mainly service-oriented, and consulting services are one of the main economic drivers.

One particular point I want to highlight. In your questions, I saw the request for support about ESG - Environmental, Social & Governance - in doing business. Yes: this is an important point. We are supporting a seminar in HCMC on May 31st about this particular topic. All business in the EU will have to incorporate ESG into their DNA. Doing responsible business while ensuring a level-playing field for all is a key EU target. On a similar note, the upcoming regulations about due diligence and the EU carbon adjustment mechanism will also require companies to innovate. While this might look challenging, it will also provide new opportunities for those who will adapt.

In today's Webinar, I really appreciate the Brussels Agency for Business Support – hub.brussels has organized the floor for VCCI- the representative for the voice of Vietnamese business and Belgian agencies together with Brussels experts to share their view, updates and advice.

I am happy to welcome professional associations of Vietnam, companies, exporters to the Webinar and I do hope that you will find it an interesting reference for your business plan in Europe.

I would like to thank all of you for your participation and I wish great success to this event!