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**Vietnam**

# **Ky's visit**

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## **Description:**

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**IV has again interviewed Tuan, a Vietnamese holding French nationality, following one of his regular visits to Vietnam and the USA. The interview was conducted by Jean-Michel Krivine.**



**You regularly visit these two countries. [1]** Their relations have clearly improved since the lifting of the US economic embargo in 1994, the recognition of the country in 1995 and the ratification of the trade treaty in 2001. Vietnam hasn't yet joined the World Trade Organization but what is new in the current relationship?

There was also an event which has been much commented on in the two countries, the visit to Vietnam by general Nguyen Cao Ky in January of this year.

**Can you remind us what this was about?**

Ky is an aviation officer who was in the South Vietnamese government during the war. He was prime minister and air vice-marshal from 1965 to 1967, governing Vietnam under US supervision, then he became vice president in 1967 when Nguyen Van Thieu was elected president.

He had, then, a leading role for many years. It was said that he was behind the use of Vietnamese pilots to bomb North Vietnam from 1965 onwards (he had kissed the first bomb).

**How was his visit to Vietnam organized?**

He told the BBC after his return to the US that he was now 73 years old, that the war was over and that the young generation had to understand the need to turn the page. For him Vietnam had only been a pawn between the giants of the Cold War, the USSR-China and the USA. He thought that history would judge and that meanwhile the Vietnamese, and especially the former combatants, should reconcile themselves.

As to how he was able to make his visit, he wasn't too clear. He made his request at the end of 2001 and finally got his visa for Tết [new year festival period] 2004, thanks, it seems to a relative more or less linked to the former Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (from 1991 to 1997) Vo Van Kiet. He arrived on January 14 for a couple of weeks and was able to meet his family and friends.

### **Why did the authorities in Hanoi grant him his visa?**

For two years Vietnam has been appealing for national reconciliation. Not for moral reasons but in order to benefit from the technical and financial support of the émigré community. There are nearly two million Vietnamese in the US (and nearly 400,000 in France). There are 80 million people in Vietnam of whom half never experienced the war, thus they have no resentment against the Americans and even try to mimic them in numerous areas. When president Clinton came to Vietnam for three days in 1999 he was warmly received by young people. Abroad the young generation didn't live through the war and they don't share the resentment of their parents in relation to the Communist regime. In fact there is a bountiful capital in terms of brainpower and dollars if trade with the Vietnamese of California takes off. On the two sides national reconciliation is now being advocated.

### **Is the Vietnamese community in the US divided over the visit?**

Obviously it is more than divided, it is torn. It's enough to see the hatred expressed by most of the 20-odd Vietnamese newspapers published in the US. Ky is being called every name under the sun but not by the young generation, on whom Hanoi is counting. Ky was the first to reestablish contact but there will definitely be others. There are many émigrés who would like to go back but remain prudent because the older elements of the community remain viscerally anti-Communist. The future will tell us whether we have to wait for their disappearance in order for the page to be really turned.

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[1] See '[Return from Vietnam 2000](#)', IV 328, February 2001.