

The Thirteenth Party Congress of Vietnam on development goals, people's happiness and lessons learned from the Reform

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Abstract: *The Thirteenth National Party Congress of Vietnam (in 2021) has summarized to define five lessons learnt from the Party's leadership and management practice and the national vital development over the past 30 years of the national reform since the mid-1980s. These lessons, which were referred in the previous congresses, have now been thoroughly explored, elucidated and further affirmed. Development goals, both general and particular, have also been approved for the 13th term and further for each imminent period accompanied by important historical milestones. This conveys economic and symbolic significance to encourage the creativity of all socio-economic subjects and nationwide aspirations for development to successfully realize the goal of building a prosperous and happy country in the near future.*

Keyword: Communist Party of Vietnam, The Thirteenth National Congress, Development Goals, Happiness

1. The goals of national development and the people's happiness

Regarding the development goals, the Political Report of the Thirteenth National Congress has committed to: "Strengthen the leadership, ruling capacity, and resilience of the Party; Build a comprehensively pristine and vigorous Party and political system; Bolster and consolidate the people's confidence in the Party, State, and the socialist regime; Stimulate the aspiration to develop national prosperity and happiness, and promote the will and strength of the great national unity in tandem with the epochal force; Promote comprehensively and synchronously the

course of the renovation, industrialization, and modernization; Vehemently build and safeguard the fatherland, maintain the state of peace and stability; Intensify the effort to turn our country into developed with a socialist orientation by the middle of the twenty-first century" (CPV, 2021: 111-112). Notably, not only for its 5-year term, but the Thirteenth Congress has also set forth the overarching development objectives for the entire 10-year with a vision extended to the mid-twenty-first century. Its rationale rests with that in 2025, Vietnam will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the South and national reunification; in 2030 the 100th anniversary of the founding of the

Party; and in 2045 the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. These are symbolic landmarks that are meant to stimulate creative development in all socio-economic spheres and promote the development of the country. Moreover, the missed development milestone on the industrial status has induced the decision-makers to rethink the potential and limitations to be addressed for future development. On the subjective side, “the leadership and ruling capacity” today is a resource to be unshackled. This is a new concept that directly defines the capabilities and responsibilities of the management activity. After over 30 years of *Đổi mới* (Reform), with both fruitful and vain practical outcomes, Vietnam’s leaders at all levels have proved their leadership qualifications and confidently materialized the strategic development visions.

For the development goals, the document of the Thirteenth National Congress emphasize the need to: “Stimulate the aspiration to develop the national prosperity and happiness, and promote the will and strength of the great national unity in tandem with the epochal force” (CPV, 2021: 111-112). Although it is far from novelty, its stress remains significant. The development aspiration in Vietnam made an early footprint and has always been fervid among classes of Vietnamese people, from the leaders to senior citizens and ordinary workers. But on several occasions, many specific goals failed to live up to expectations. Up to now, the goal of becoming an industrial country is still a long way ahead, thus “stimulating the aspiration to develop a prosperous and happy country” has become increasingly urgent.

In the Political Report of the Thirteenth National Congress, are specific development goals are clearly stated as follows: 1) By 2025, the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the South and the national reunification is marked as an industrial, developing country in the direction of modernity, surpassing the low-middle income thresholds; 2) By 2030, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Party is marked as a developing country with modern industry and high middle income; 3) By 2045, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, now the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, is marked as a developed country with high income (CPV, 2021: 112).

Currently, according to the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Vietnam’s income per capita is 2,906 USD and 3,499 USD correspondingly, which remains in the group of 55 average low middle-income countries (See: WB Vietnam, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=VN>; IMF Vietnam, <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/VNM>).

Vietnam has surpassed the income per capita of 1,000 USD in 2009. The quantitative objectives of the Thirteenth Congress are: by 2025, Vietnam’s income per capita will reach approximately 4,700-5,000 USD, bypassing the low middle-income thresholds; by 2030 about 7,500 USD, reaching the high average income thresholds; and become a high-income-developed country by 2045 (CPV, 2021: 113). These objectives are hope-filled and widely regarded as realistic by many foreign experts.

In 2006, Mr. Il Houn Lee, Chief Representative of the IMF in Vietnam suggested a forecast based upon the ASEAN countries’ growth rate remaining as that of

the past 10 years that Vietnam could take 18 years to catch up with Indonesia, 34 years with Thailand and 197 years with Singapore. But up to now, as long as the equation goes with the assumption that all ASEAN countries are still developing as in the past 10 years (2010-2019), it would only take Vietnam 12 years to catch up with Indonesia, 27 years with Thailand, 98 years with Malaysia and 115 years with Singapore (See: Thai Quynh, 2021). Although those figures and quantitative calculations provide a meaningful vehicle for every economy to locate its national position in comparison with the international community, they are merely symbolic. The development of the society with the dimensional complexity and diversity of the developed infrastructure, technological progress, and cultural life, is a variable that is baffling for an accurate measurement, no less easy for reflecting people's societal satisfaction. Therefore, the concept of happiness is needed. After all, happiness is the valid barometer of human goals and a worthy standard of public policy.

It is no coincidence that the member states of the United Nations voted to adopt Resolution 65/309 titled "Happiness: Towards a Holistic Approach to Development" of the United Nations General Assembly (19th July 2011). The Resolution aims to call on governments to realize more profoundly about the importance of the pursuit of happiness and bring happiness to the standards of the public policy that is underlined by the United Nations as: "Conscious that the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental human goal; Recognizing that the gross domestic product indicator by nature was not designed to and does not adequately reflect

the happiness and well-being of people in a country..." (United Nations, 2011).

The concept of happiness as a novelty of the Thirteenth Congress is mentioned much more frequently in its instruments than those in the previous term. In the instruments, *happiness* is presented as a goal to strive for, an aspiration for national development, the paramount standard of the Vietnamese family, and a development face of the country.

Upon the lessons learned from the cause of reform, *happiness* is mentioned in the Political Report at the Thirteenth Congress as the goal for consolidating and bolstering the people's confidence. The report clearly states: "Forging close relationships with the people, relying on the people to build the Party; *taking the people's happiness and well-being as the striving goal*, consolidating and bolstering the people's confidence in the Party, State and the socialist regime" (CPV, 2021: 97). In the contents of "Principal viewpoints" belong the development vision and orientation, the "Overall goal" of development, the "Development orientation of the country in the period of 2021-2030", and the section on "Education and training, the quality of human resource and human development", "Key tasks" and "Strategic breakthroughs", *happiness* is presented as an aspiration for the national development and should be inspirational as a great spiritual driving force of the whole nation. The fourth orientation of the national development stage during 2021 and 2030 is set out in the document of the Thirteenth Congress as follows: "To develop comprehensively the people and build up advanced Vietnamese culture imbued with ethnic values upon which Vietnamese people truly become endogenous

strength, dynamics of national development and defense. Increase investment in cultural development. Build, develop and create the most favorable environment and social conditions to evoke patriotic tradition, national pride, belief, and aspiration to develop a prosperous and happy country; identify Vietnamese people's talents, intelligence, and qualities as the center, the most important goal and driving force for the country's development" (CPV, 2021: 116).

In this section "Build and promote Vietnamese cultural values and human strength", the Political Report mentions happiness as a standard for building a Vietnamese family, which affirms the task to: "Focus on research, identification, and development of the system of national values, system of cultural values and human standards in association with the preservation and development of the Vietnamese familial values in the new period... Vietnamese familial culture standards strive towards prosperity, happiness, progressiveness, and civilization. Uphold the role of the family in nurturing and educating the young generation" (CPV, 2021: 143-144).

As a trait of the national development face, happiness is expressed in the Political Report as follows: "Our country will patently achieve to new development miracles for Vietnam of prosperity, happiness, progressively siding with the great powers of the five continents, successfully realizing the wish of the great President Ho Chi Minh and the aspiration of the whole nation" (CPV, 2021: 205).

2. Lessons learned drawn from the Reform Era

In the Thirteenth Party Congress' document, based on the summary of

lessons learned, five notes drawn from the practical leadership and management as well as those from the cause of the reform are included in the Political Report of the Congress as follows: 1) "The Party building and disciplining must be deployed vehemently, comprehensively, synchronously and regularly, (...) strengthen the leadership and ruling capacity, and resilience of the Party"; 2) "People are the root"; 3) "Promote the responsibility of the leader associated with the synchronous driving force of the political system"; 4) "Build a synchronous development regime"; 5) "Avoid being passive or staggered; resolutely persevere and defend the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the country coupled with sustaining the peaceful and stable environment for national development" (CPV, 2021: 95-98).

With the experiences, the novelties of the Thirteenth Party Congress' document are the identification of and emphasis on the "comprehensiveness" of the task of the Party building, disciplining - not only in political, ideological, organizational, but also ethical spheres. This reflects the morality of some party cadres and members who have long exhibited signs of serious deterioration and must be rectified and disciplined. The resolution of the Fourth Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee (January 2012) imposed stringent solutions on this issue. At the Thirteenth Congress, along with the task of the Party building and disciplining, the Congress has raised the issue of "power control mechanism". This is a novelty reflecting the changing needs of practical management leadership which were previously almost absent. Just as C. L. Montesquieu and J. J. Rousseau

warned early on¹: all powers are prone to abuse and corruption if not subject to an effective and rigorous control mechanism. In the system of a single party in power, this rule is no exception. Therefore, the “promotion of the responsibility of the heads” and “requirement on developing strategic leadership levels” for the future are the substance of the Thirteenth Congress indicated in its lessons.

As stated above, all five lessons mentioned by the past Congresses have been studied, considered, supplemented, deepened, and reaffirmed by the Thirteenth Congress.

The practice of Vietnam’s reform has signified that the lessons on the building of the Party, people as root, have been drawn from 1986 as the reform course was initiated. At the time, on the lessons taken from the actual socio-economic crisis of the country, the Sixth Congress (1986) made four notes: 1) “Take people as the root”; 2) “The Party must always observe the reality, respect and act according to the law of objectivity... All undertakings and policies with adverse effects are the manifestation of improper application of the law of objectivity and must be amended or repealed”; 3) “Combine the strength of the nation with the epochal force”; 4) “Build the Party on par with political tasks” (CPV, 2005: 28-30).

The document of the Sixth Congress affirmed: “The Party must thoroughly grasp the idea of “take people as the root” (...) Our Party has no other purpose than to fight

for the people’s happiness. The masses are the people who make history (...) Amidst the Party’s flaws and defects, the people still eagerly long for the Party to correct its mistakes and advance the country ahead. Our Party cannot fail the people’s expectations. Major lessons learned from the past years in terms of the ruling party, all undertakings and policies of the Party must stem from the interests, aspirations, and abilities of the working people” (CPV, 2005: 28).

Through many Congresses, due to emerging practical characteristics in each stage, with new lessons, some preexisting lessons were to be reaffirmed or emphasized on some aspects or characteristics.

At the Seventh Congress (1991), two lessons were added as to *hold on to the banner of national independence and socialism and strengthen great national unity in the entire population*. At that Congress, *the Credo on National Construction in the Transitional Period to Socialism* was defined and adopted. In the *Credo*, five lessons on the implementation of the Reform were summarized: 1) “Hold on to the banner of national independence and socialism”; 2) “The revolutionary cause is of the people, by the people, and for the people”; 3) “Continuously consolidate and strengthen the unity of the whole Party, the whole people, national unity and international solidarity”; 4) “Combine national strength with the epochal force”; 5) “The righteous leadership of the Party is the key driver toward the victory” (CPV, 2005: 310-312). Upon summarization of 10 years of the Reform, the Eighth Congress (1996) drew six key lessons, including the third lesson on the market economy which then called *the commodity economy with*

¹ See: Montesquieu (1748), *The Spirit of law* (Vietnamese translation by Hoang Thanh Dam), Political Theory Publishing House, Hanoi, 2006, pp. 105-106; Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762), *The social contract* (translated by Hoang Thanh Dam), Political Theory Publishing House, Hanoi, 2004, p. 218.

many components were affirmed and emphasized: 1) “Step up to the goals of national independence and socialism”; 2) “Closely combine economic renovation with political renovation”; 3) “Build a multi-component commodity economy based on the market mechanism, in parallel with strengthening the management role of the State with the socialist orientation”; 4) “Expand and strengthen the great national unity of the whole people”; 5) “Expand international cooperation, combining the strength of the nation with the epochal force”; 6) “Strengthen the leadership role of the Party, consider the Party building as the key task” (CPV, 2005: 457-461).

The Eleventh Congress (2001) reaffirmed that the lessons raised by the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Party Congresses were still of great value, especially the principal lessons.

The Ninth Congress (2006) highlighted five major lessons, including those on *the combination of national strength with the epochal force; promote endogenous forces, take advantage of exogenous forces* were emphasized: 1) “Strengthen the goal of national independence and socialism”; 2) “Comprehensive and synchronous innovation with succession and proper steps, forms and methods”; 3) “For the sake of the people, the revolution is the cause of the people, for the people and by the people”; 4) “Promote endogenous forces, take advantage of exogenous forces, combine national strength with the epochal force”; 5) “Improve the Party’s leadership and resilience, build a clean and strong Party” (CPV, 2006: 70-72).

From the leadership and direction practice in the early years of the twenty-first century, the Eleventh Congress (2011) drew five

experiences (not lessons) that emphasizes *the combination of economic growth with the realization of social progress and justice*: 1) “Persevere in the implementation of the reform policy and goals, steadfastly and creatively apply, develop Marxism - Leninism, Ho Chi Minh’s thought, steadfast in the goal of national independence and socialism”; 2) “Truly attach importance to growth quality and efficiency, and sustainable development”; 3) “Closely combine economic growth with social progress and justice”; 4) “Special care is taken to strengthen and build the Party”; 5) “In the course of leadership and direction, it is necessary to be very sensitive, resolute, creative, observe the reality of the country” (CPV, 2011: 21-22).

Also at the Eleventh Congress, *the Credo for National Construction in the Transition to Socialism (Supplemented and Developed)* was adopted and major lessons learned were clearly stated. The emphasis is rested on: the righteous leadership of the Party as the prerequisite for determining the victory of the revolution. The five lessons indicated in the *Credo* were: 1) “Hold on to the banner of national independence and socialism”; 2) “The revolutionary cause is of the people, by the people, and for the people”; 3) “Continuously consolidating and strengthening the unity of the whole Party and people, national unity and international solidarity”; 4) “Combine national strength with the epochal force, domestic forces with international forces”; 5) “The righteous leadership of the Party is the prerequisite for determining the victory of the Vietnamese revolution” (CPV, 2011: 65-66).

At the Twelfth Congress (2016), from the reform practice, the lesson to be stressed was: *to put the national interest - the*

people above everything else and focus on building a body of cadres, especially the strategic staff. Five lessons were identified included: 1) “Persevere the goals of national independence and socialism”; 2) “The people is the root”, for the sake of the people, relying on the people, promoting the people’s role of mastery, sense of responsibility, creativity, and their resources; Promote the strength of the great national unity”; 3) “Respect the law of objectivity, based upon and observe the reality, attach importance to summarizing the reality”; 4) “Put the interests of the nation - the people first”; 5) “Regularly renew oneself, self-regulate, and strengthen the Party’s leadership capacity and resilience; Build a body of cadres, especially those at the strategic level, who are capable of and qualified for the tasks” (CPV, 2016: 69-70). Hence, since the Sixth Congress, as the lessons have been reaffirmed through the Congresses, several significant aspects are supplemented and deepened or emphasized to underscore the urgency of each lesson. Ever since 1986, the lessons have revolved around *people as root, the Party building, respect of and action based upon the law of objectivity.* From the Seventh Congress, lessons about national independence and socialism and the great national unity that mentioned in the 1991 *Credo* reaffirmed in the *Credo* supplemented and amended in 2011. At the Eighth Congress, lessons on *building the market economy* were shaped and became the orientation for the development of the national economy since then. At the Tenth Congress, against the background that Vietnam was actively *integrating into the world and taking part in globalization,* emphasis was laid on *the combination of national strength*

with the epochal force. At the Eleventh Congress, *the issue of social progress and justice* emerged and *the lesson of the Party’s righteous leadership* was stressed as the prerequisite for all victories. At the Twelfth Congress, from the experience of the implementation of the Resolution of the Fourth Central Committee of the eleventh term and to meet the needs of protecting the Fatherland in the new situation, the lesson was emphasized in that *the interests of the nation and the people must be put above all else and focus on developing a body of cadres, especially those at the strategic level.* At the Thirteenth Congress, lessons were noted about *upholding the responsibility of the head, institutional building, the policy of not being passive or staggered in protecting national independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of the Fatherland.*

The lessons learned in the document of the Congresses are all political orientations with long-lasting effects, but at the same time, they are also breakthroughs that promote national development plans and protection of the Fatherland and intending to meet the urgent requirements posed to the country at every Congress.

Conclusion

The development objectives set out for the term 2021-2016 and every subsequent stage in the process of national development and the lessons outlined in the document of the Thirteenth National Congress of the CPV are meant to trigger the dynamics, stimulate the drivers and strategies for national development and defense. At the same time, there are also political orientations with long-lasting effects to meet the development aspirations for a Vietnam of prosperity and happiness □

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