

INFORMATION OF SCIENTIFIC ACTIVITIES**Scientific conference: Competition between great powers in the Greater Mekong Sub-region**

On July 1, 2021, in Hanoi, the Institute of World Economics and Politics (under the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences) held a scientific conference with the theme “Competition between great powers in the Greater Mekong sub-region” to identify the causes, nature, content and methods of the compete with countries in the Greater Mekong sub-region (GMS), thus forecasting possible scenarios, providing implications for Vietnam in policy making with relevant countries to take advantage of the positive impacts, minimize negative impacts, protect the integrity of territorial sovereignty, maintain a peaceful and stable environment for national construction and development in the coming period. The conference is held in face-to-face and online format.

Five papers presented at the conference focused on the following issues: GMS geopolitical strategic competition; The importance of the Mekong River for ASEAN; Policy to increase US influence over GMS; The rise of China’s influence in the GMS under President Xi Jinping;... The Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) includes five countries belonging to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) namely Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and two provinces (Yunnan and Guangxi) of China, with total area of 2.6 million square kilometers. This is an area with great economic potential with rich resource reserves and the Mekong is an important river for the lives of more than 60 million people of the countries in the river

basin, specially the resources of the Mekong River basin in terms of agriculture - forestry, fishery, hydropower and waterway transport, etc.

In recent decades, Southeast Asia has always been concerned about the situation in the middle, the dilemma of maintaining a balanced relationship with the US and China. China’s establishment of the Mekong-Lancang cooperation mechanism (MLC) has raised strategic doubts about its plans and influence in the region. Small and medium-sized countries have long sought to reach out to the powers outside the GMS to maintain the regional order, by pursuing not only security cooperation but also deepening economic ties, in order to limit monopolistic dominance of any one power, while creating economic interdependence and reaping the benefits of cooperation. However, this gives the impression that the small countries in Southeast Asia are actively pursuing the big powers. The effectiveness of this ambivalent strategy depends mainly on what the great powers allow. Attendees agreed that this one-way property needs to be reconsidered under certain conditions.

The exchanges of the delegates were unanimous, the commitments of the external powers benefit the countries of the Mekong sub-region by creating more options for economic development. However, maintaining a fine balance between the major powers, particularly the US and China, is a challenge. Countries in the GMS region need to unite, unify and send a clear message that strengthening cooperation with external powers cannot be equated with choosing sides.

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