SUMMARY REPORT:

Canada–Viet Nam Forum on Economic Resilience and CPTPP–EU Linkages

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The Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, the Ministry of Industry and Trade of Viet Nam, and the Embassy of Canada to Viet Nam co-hosted the Canada–Viet Nam Forum on Economic Resilience and CPTPP–EU Linkages on July 20, 2026, in Ho Chi Minh City, with the support of the Canadian Chambers of Commerce in Viet Nam.

Introduction

Members of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the European Union began formal engagement in November 2025, when trade ministers convened the inaugural CPTPP–EU Trade and Investment Dialogue in Melbourne, Australia, and issued a joint statement identifying digital trade, supply chain resilience, and the global trade environment as areas for co-operation. That engagement now faces its first test: whether it can produce outcomes at the ministerial meeting in Ha Noi in November 2026, or whether it remains a statement of shared intent.

The Forum was timed to precede the third CPTPP Senior Officials' Meeting of Viet Nam's chairmanship year, and brought together senior officials from Canada, Viet Nam, Japan, Singapore, and the EU and business leaders, legal practitioners, academics, and chambers of commerce.

Together, the two groupings account for roughly 32 per cent of global GDP and 37 per cent of global trade, and participants largely treated the strategic case for alignment as settled. The discussion concentrated instead on what can be delivered, in what order, and through which instruments. A set of constraints became clear: a short window for co-ordination to deliver outcomes this year, limited negotiating capacity, particularly in the lower-income CPTPP members, asymmetric institutional structures, and a persistent gap between agreements as written and agreements as used.

The discussion focused on near-term actions that can be advanced without first resolving the larger questions of regulatory convergence.

A short window and a narrow agenda

Echoing Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, participants framed the current moment as a rupture rather than a transition. Mary-Catherine Speirs, Director General of the Trade Negotiations Bureau at Global Affairs Canada and Canada's Senior Official for the CPTPP, noted once more that "nostalgia is not a strategy" and that middle powers cannot wait for the rules-based system to return to what it once was.

The statistical picture supported that framing. The share of global trade conducted under most-favoured-nation terms has fallen from approximately 83 per cent in 2022 to roughly 72 per cent in early 2026, and recorded coercive economic measures rose sharply between 2024 and 2025. The concern was less any single measure than the negative spiral it sets in motion as third countries respond in kind.

Ngo Chung Khanh, Deputy Director General of the Multilateral Trade Policy Department at Viet Nam's Ministry of Industry and Trade and Viet Nam's Senior Official for the CPTPP, made the same point in terms of policy risk. Economic resilience, he argued, does not mean economic isolation: it means diversification, trusted partnerships, and an open, transparent, rules-based environment. If economic security is pursued mainly through new barriers, fragmented regulation, and inward-looking policies, the result may be higher costs, reduced investment, and weaker innovation rather than greater resilience. The measure of the agreement's success, he said, is not the number of commitments it contains but the number of enterprises that understand them and convert them into investment and trade.

Viet Nam's chairmanship and the road to Ha Noi

Nguyen Son Tra, Head of the WTO and Trade Negotiations Division at the Ministry of Industry and Trade and Viet Nam's Deputy Senior Official for the CPTPP, set out the chairmanship agenda, built around the theme of "Shared Visions, Shared Actions." Members have agreed on five priorities:

1. Keeping the agreement modern and relevant through the general review and upgrade negotiation, including on digital trade and supply chain resilience;

2. Managing expansion in a way that preserves the agreement's high standards and credibility;

3. Strengthening co-operation with external partners, of which the EU dialogue is the leading example;

4. Reinforcing the CPTPP's institutional foundations, including continued work toward a support unit;

5. Improving implementation and utilization, with the explicit objective of increasing use of the agreement not only for tariff preferences but in services, investment, digital trade, and regional supply chains.

She reported that members had held two Senior Officials' Meetings in March and May, a virtual ministerial meeting, and a Commission meeting, and had agreed to establish an ad hoc working group.

The clearest structural contribution of the Forum concerned sequencing. Elvire Fabry of the Jacques Delors Institute described the CPTPP–EU Track 1.5 process, launched in Paris in December 2025 and continued in Tokyo in May 2026, as having mapped the work into three buckets. In the short term, the priority is preventing rapid further erosion through standstill commitments, waivers, disciplined implementation of existing agreements, and avoiding friendly fire between partners pursuing their own resilience strategies. World Trade Organization reform sits firmly in the long term. The centre of gravity is the medium term — digital trade, supply chain resilience, and structural challenges such as overcapacity — where there is room to manoeuvre.

Against that framework, Rafael de Bustamante Tello, Deputy Head of the EU Delegation to Viet Nam, tabled four proposed deliverables that the EU would like to see announced in Ha Noi.

1. The launch of a crisis response network for supply chain disruptions, initially in the form of an agreed list of contact points, with terms of reference to follow;

2. Endorsement of a reference paper on logistics and supply chain services, building on existing best practices in EU and CPTPP disciplines where broad convergence already exists;

3. A common position on trade-related environmental measures, with a commitment to jointly develop guidance on their design and implementation;

4. The announcement of a scoping paper for a future digital trade agreement, drawing on a joint report of key learnings on digital trade policy that partners have agreed in principle to produce.

These would be endorsed through a joint ministerial statement that could also carry political commitments on shared principles of trade policy and economic security.

De Bustamante was equally clear about the constraints. The EU is not seeking treaties or legally binding instruments at this stage; the work will proceed through softer commitments. The partnership is under a year old, and the absence of a CPTPP secretariat is a practical impediment given that the European Commission has standing machinery for exactly this kind of work. The ambition, he said, is to take small steps quickly rather than large steps slowly, with the emphasis on being able to announce at least one tangible outcome in November. Timing reinforced that discipline: the window for co-ordination among like-minded economies was estimated at two to three years, not a decade, and Peru assumes the CPTPP chair in 2027.

Dan Ciuriak, an economist and APF Canada Distinguished Fellow, recommended that the two blocs form a 'small open economies' caucus within the WTO to link the CPTPP–EU work to the broader WTO maintenance and evolution efforts. Such an organization would, in his argument, retain two things a bilateral process cannot supply on its own: transparency and legitimacy. It would also preserve the ability to roll results forward — to take what a CPTPP–EU convergence exercise produces and carry it into the multilateral system rather than leaving it as a closed arrangement between two groupings. His premise was that small open economies have not abandoned the system but are rallying around it, negotiating new agreements built on the existing templates and seeking terms that eliminate the weaponization of trade; a caucus would give that constituency a formal seat rather than leaving it dispersed.

Interoperability without uniformity

Discussion of digital trade proceeded from a candid acknowledgment that the two blocs start from different premises. The CPTPP's starting point is that data should flow freely across borders, with restrictions justified through carefully defined exceptions for legitimate public policy objectives. The EU begins from the protection of fundamental rights, including personal data, permitting cross-border transfers where appropriate safeguards are in place.

Participants with direct negotiating experience described bridging that gap as among the most difficult issues encountered, but not an intractable one. The e-commerce provisions of the Japan–EU Economic Partnership Agreement produced a hybrid outcome: some provisions based primarily on the CPTPP approach with adjustments reflecting European concerns, others built on the European model while incorporating elements the CPTPP side valued, and rules on cross-border data flows representing a genuine compromise. That precedent is not isolated. Several CPTPP parties have concluded digital trade arrangements with the EU in some form, and reading across those agreements reveals the outline of a gradual convergence.

The practical conclusion was that interoperability requires neither identical rules nor full regulatory convergence. In the near term, the achievable work runs through the digitalization of trade documentation — electronic payments, invoicing, certificates of origin, and bills of lading — alongside mutual recognition arrangements delivering measurable cost and time savings.

Two qualifications will govern the pace. The first is sequencing: the CPTPP is currently negotiating its own e-commerce chapter as part of the upgrade, and members need clarity on where that lands before negotiating externally on the same subject. The second is that the digital agenda cannot function until first-order domestic questions are resolved, including whether a domestic legal framework grants electronic documents equivalence to paper, and whether one ministry has the legal authority to share information with another.

Preparing for disruption before it arrives

Participants were united on the diagnosis of shared exposure to disruption and productively divided on what to do about it. A critical minerals example: export restrictions affecting one economy's access to gallium would not stop with its own manufacturers, since the material enters semiconductor components subsequently incorporated into products and vehicles manufactured in Malaysia, Viet Nam, Mexico, and Europe. Neither self-sufficiency nor decoupling is the answer, since expanding domestic production of upstream resources is often not feasible. The practical agenda comprises improved supply chain transparency, information-sharing, including early warning, public-private partnerships to develop alternative sources of supply, and co-operation on strategic stockpiles and recycling.

The most specific institutional proposal concerned crisis response, and it converged closely with the deliverable already on the negotiating table. Because a crisis is the wrong moment to determine whom to call, Deborah Elms of the Hinrich Foundation proposed a mechanism established in advance with four components: agreed focal points; notification when a party believes it is in a crisis, identifying its nature; a further notification of the measures being taken in response; and a mechanism to declare a crisis over and withdraw those measures. As Elms put it, "crises should not be forever." This work is inexpensive, requires no legal instrument, and could be launched in November.

Two cautions were highlighted. The first concerned supply-chain mapping. An exhaustive effort during the COVID-19 pandemic to map supply chains for masks, ventilators, and protective equipment produced a database that was out of date the moment it was published, because firms that had made those products stopped — and firms that never had began. Mapping was judged a poor use of scarce resources.

The second concerned rules of origin and produced the Forum's most useful disagreement. Harmonization was assessed as perhaps a decade of work that cannot begin until common rules exist and tariff commitments are attached to them. Against this, the issue was reported to have gained momentum between the Paris and Tokyo meetings because the business sector perceives immediate value, and a narrower proposal was advanced from the Vietnamese side: not harmonization, but linking the accumulation regimes both blocs already operate, with sectors such as textiles and garments offering demonstrable near-term gains. That distinction is where a resolution most plausibly lies, and a scoping exercise on cumulation would be a reasonable outcome for the coming period.

On investment screening, substantive alignment was judged unavailable; what can be co-ordinated are shared regulatory principles: non-discrimination, transparency, proportionality, accountability, along with clear communication of national approaches so that firms are aware of the rules and can act accordingly.

An agreement in force is not an agreement in use

A highly consequential issue raised was that, nearly a decade after its conclusion, the CPTPP remains underleveraged. Tariff reductions have taken hold, but the deeper integration the agreement was designed to enable — in investment, services, regulatory alignment, and supply chain restructuring — has lagged expectations across much of the membership.

Four causes were identified from the Vietnamese perspective. Overlapping agreements mean firms default to the instruments they already know, particularly where the rules are less demanding. Commitments on services and investment are structurally shallower than those on goods. Non-tariff measures, while frequently serving legitimate purposes, have increased in some sectors as tariffs have fallen, eroding the preference margins the agreement created. And understanding is limited: Viet Nam now has 17 agreements in force, the CPTPP alone runs to 30 chapters, and survey evidence indicates that fewer than 20 per cent of businesses understand FTA commitments well — in an economy where some 97 per cent of enterprises are small or medium-sized.

The European experience of implementing the EU–Viet Nam Free Trade Agreement produced a mirror image: roughly half of the weekly correspondence between the European Chamber in Vietnam and the Vietnamese government concerns implementation issues. For example, without correct origin determination by customs authorities, the benefits of the EVFTA are unavailable regardless of what the text says.

Several near-term responses emerged. The first is sequencing: members should review the implementation of existing commitments before negotiating new ones, ideally through a comprehensive assessment of how the CPTPP has actually been used across the membership, and revise provisions that are not delivering. This is directly relevant to the general review now underway. The second is a set of concrete facilitation measures — a CPTPP single window on the model ASEAN already operates, trusted and mutually recognized digital signatures, certificates and statuses for business, and harmonization (or mutual recognition of conformity assessment) of testing and certification standards — together with two priorities that matter disproportionately to smaller firms: facilitation of small packages, and cross-border delivery of digital services.

The third response is institutional. Viet Nam's FTA Support Ecosystem, now approved by the government, was presented as the most developed answer to the utilization problem. Recognizing that ministry-led training alone could not reach an overwhelmingly SME economy, the programme mobilizes financial institutions, logistics providers, universities, and research institutions into a co-ordinated public–private mechanism that supports firms not only with information but with the practical requirements of operating in foreign markets. It was offered as a model other members might reference.

What this means for Canada

Canada occupies an unusual position in this process, serving as co-chair and facilitator for official engagement between the CPTPP parties and the EU in support of Viet Nam's chairmanship. The Forum nonetheless surfaced a gap between Canada's institutional prominence in the process and its commercial presence in the region.

Canadian ambassador to Viet Nam Jim Nickel noted that bilateral merchandise trade exceeded C$20 billion in 2025, but the relationship remains markedly one-sided, with Canadian exports representing a small fraction of the total. Canada is also home to some of the world's largest institutional investors, yet activity in Viet Nam remains limited. The explanation offered was Canadian familiarity with the U.S. market, and the remedy was a more deliberate government-private sector partnership identifying specific opportunities, with Viet Nam's hosting of APEC in 2027 a natural focal point.

One observation deserves particular attention. Jean-Jacques Bouflet, Vice Chairman of the European Chamber of Commerce in Viet Nam, noted that the European, American, Japanese, and Korean chambers already co-ordinate advocacy on shared implementation barriers, and that together these economies account for roughly 80 per cent of Viet Nam's exports. There is an open invitation for the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Vietnam to join in this process. Given that implementation obstacles are largely technical and administrative rather than political, this represents a low-cost avenue for Canadian contribution.

On the substance of the CPTPP–EU agenda, Canadian analytical capacity is already contributing in the form the process needs. An APF Canada exercise co-ordinated through the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council identified some 30 incremental improvements to the CPTPP's digital chapter — well-specified, implementable, and directed at a pillar where ministers have already agreed to work. That is the model for Canada's contribution to the November package: technical, concrete, and capable of completion within the window available.

Conclusion

While the strategic case for closer CPTPP–EU alignment is well understood, progress is shaped by a short co-ordination window, asymmetric institutional capacity, and the persistent distance between agreements as negotiated and agreements as used. As Speirs observed, visions and best intentions "do not move containers" — outcomes do.

Several actions were identified as achievable before the Ha Noi ministerial meeting. A crisis response mechanism can be established in advance at low cost and without a legal instrument. Trade documentation digitalization and mutual recognition offer measurable gains where convergence already exists. A scoping exercise on linking existing cumulation regimes would test a proposition that business is actively pushing without committing capacity to a decade-long harmonization project. And an assessment of how existing CPTPP commitments have actually been used would give the general review a practical evidentiary base.

Sustaining progress will depend on mechanisms that support implementation over time. Continued dialogue and more regular connections among businesses, chambers, research institutions, and government agencies were identified as the practical channels, alongside a business community willing to specify obstacles and suggest solutions. Khanh closed the Forum by asking that it be understood not as the conclusion of a conversation but as "the beginning of a practical work program."

LIST OF SPEAKERS

Welcome and Scene Setting

Mr. Barrett Bingley
Asia Regional Director, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

H.E. Jim Nickel
Ambassador of Canada to Viet Nam, Embassy of Canada

Mr. Ngo Chung Khanh
Deputy Director General, Multilateral Trade Policy Department, Ministry of Industry and Trade of Viet Nam, and Viet Nam's Senior CPTPP Official

Opening Keynote: The Geoeconomics of Trade Architecture

Ms. Mary-Catherine Spiers
Director General, Global Affairs Canada Trade Negotiations Bureau, and Canada's Senior CPTPP Official

Strategic Address: Viet Nam in the Chair — The 2026 CPTPP Agenda

Ms. Nguyen Son Tra
Director, WTO and Trade Negotiations Division, Multilateral Trade Policy Department, Ministry of Industry and Trade of Viet Nam, and Viet Nam's Deputy Senior CPTPP Official

Panel 1: Bridging the Blocs – The Strategic Case for CPTPP-EU Alignment

MODERATOR:

Mr. Barrett Bingley
Asia Regional Director, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

Dr. Elvire Fabry
Director of Trade and Economic Security, Institut Jacques Delors

Mr. Rafael de Bustamante Tello
Deputy Head of Mission, EU Delegation to Vietnam

Mr. Dan Ciuriak
Distinguished Fellow, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

Dr. Dao Ngoc Tien
Vice Principal, Foreign Trade University Viet Nam

Panel 2: Economic Security in Practice – Supply Chains, Digital Trade, and Resilience

MODERATOR

Mr. Zach Herbers
President, Canadian Chamber of Commerce Viet Nam

Dr. Deborah Elms
Head of Trade Policy, Hinrich Foundation

Mr. Darren Smith
CPTPP Deputy Senior Official, Global Affairs Canada

Ms. Kyoko Kashiwabara
Councillor for the Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, Japan's Deputy Senior Official for CPTPP

Mr. Goh Keng Phang
Economic Counsellor, Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore

Panel 3: Activating the CPTPP Opportunity – From Principles to Partnership

MODERATOR

Mr. Laurence Newman
Executive Director, Canadian Chamber of Commerce Viet Nam

Mr. Trevor Kennedy
Vice President, Business Council of Canada

Mr. Huy Do
Co-Leader Competition, Marketing and Foreign Investment and Leader, SE Asia Group, Fasken Martineau DuMoulin LLP

Ms. Phung Thi Lan Phuong
Senior International Trade Policy Expert

Mr. Jean-Jacques Bouflet
Vice-Chairman, European Chamber of Commerce

Closing Address: Where Do We Go From Here?

Mr. Ngo Chung Khanh
Deputy Director General, Multilateral Trade Policy Department, Ministry of Industry and Trade of Viet Nam, and Viet Nam's Senior CPTPP Official

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