

Enhanced Coordination Between the "Three Pillars" of Foreign Relations and Local Diplomacy in the New Era: From Awareness to Institutionalization of Strategic Action

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ABSTRACT: Entering 2026, a year marking the momentous event of the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the country officially enters the "era of national progress". In this context, thinking about foreign affairs and international integration has undergone groundbreaking transformations, most notably the identification of the mission of foreign affairs as "crucial and ongoing" and the emphasis on "strategic autonomy." Based on an analysis of the Draft Thematic Report of the Party Committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (February 2026) and practical data on public administration, this article delves into the coordination mechanism between the "Three Pillars" of foreign affairs (Party diplomacy, State diplomacy, and People-to-People diplomacy) and the local diplomacy network. Through dissecting structural bottlenecks, particularly the lack of a Department of Foreign Affairs in some localities and the disruption in the inter-sectoral data sharing ecosystem, the study proposes a comprehensive inter-sectoral matrix coordination model. At the same time, the article affirms the direct constructive role of local governments and the business community in new areas such as technology diplomacy and green transformation, thereby proposing specific solutions to concretize Resolution 250 of the National Assembly (December 2025), building a streamlined, modern apparatus, and optimizing national resources on the global geopolitical chessboard.

KEYWORDS: Three pillars of foreign policy, Local diplomacy, Institutionalization, Inter-sectoral database, 14th National Congress, Strategic autonomy, Complex crisis.

1. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE NEW ERA

The world in the third decade of the 21st century is witnessing epochal changes, where strategic competition between major powers, the rise of disruptive technologies, and non-traditional security challenges are reshaping the entire global power structure. For Vietnam, after 40 years of steadfastly implementing the Doi Moi (Renovation) policy, the country's strength and position have reached an unprecedented level in history. At the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the Party officially affirmed that Vietnam is entering a new era – an era of national development and progress. In line with the close guidance of General Secretary To Lam: "Say it and do it, do it immediately, do it correctly, do it decisively, do it to the end, and do it effectively," foreign affairs cannot be limited to principled statements but must be transformed into material resources and practical operating mechanisms to firmly protect the Fatherland and promote economic growth.

According to the Draft Special Topic of the Party Committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2026), the foreign policy guidelines of the 14th National Congress are a continuous inheritance of core values from history, but at the same time contain leaps in theoretical thinking. For the first time, the document emphasizes the goal of "Developing foreign relations in the new era, commensurate with the historical, cultural and positional stature of the country," while adding the viewpoints of "strategic autonomy" and "self-reliance." More importantly, our Party officially defines the role and mission of foreign affairs and international integration as "crucial and ongoing" (Party Committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2026, p. 3). This definition places an urgent demand on national governance: If foreign affairs is a crucial task related to the survival of the regime, then it cannot be the exclusive prerogative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or central agencies, but must be a coordinated front of the entire political system, in which the solid support role of the provincial and city-level governments and civil entities stands out.

Although the policy is clear, the practical implementation is revealing worrying gaps between macro-level planning and micro-level execution capacity. The document from the Party Committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs bravely confronted the truth by pointing out shortcomings in resource allocation and organizational structure, particularly the fact that some localities currently lack specialized Foreign Affairs Departments, as well as weaknesses in the mechanism for information sharing and inter-sectoral data connectivity (Section III.6). Based on these concerns, this article aims to dissect institutional bottlenecks and propose a system of

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solutions to improve the effectiveness of coordination between the three pillars of foreign affairs and local diplomacy, establishing a synchronized and smooth operational foundation capable of responding to complex foreign affairs issues in the era of deep integration.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE "THREE PILLARS" AND LOCAL DIPLOMACY

To understand the necessity of inter-sectoral coordination, it is first necessary to clarify the meaning of the concept of "Three Pillars" of foreign policy in the Party's thought. According to the spirit of the 14th National Congress, Vietnam's foreign policy operates on the solid foundation of three components: Party diplomacy, State diplomacy, and People-to-People diplomacy. In this division of labor and coordination, Party diplomacy plays a strategic guiding role, establishing the highest level of political trust; State diplomacy plays a core role in codifying and creating legal frameworks, negotiating bilateral and multilateral agreements; while People-to-People diplomacy creates a broad social foundation, promotes soft power, spreads cultural identity, and builds friendship from the roots of the community. The intertwining and mutual support between these three pillars create a multi-layered network of protection and development, eliminating the blind spots often encountered in traditional, one-dimensional diplomacy.

A brilliant theoretical highlight in the Draft of the 14th Party Congress is the profound explanation by the Party Committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2026) of the "crucial and ongoing" nature of foreign affairs work. According to the document, this is a task "of paramount importance, related to the survival, security, prosperity and decline of the country, linked to the history of nation-building and national defense... making a significant contribution to the successful implementation of the two strategic tasks of building and defending the Fatherland" (p. 3). This understanding completely eliminates the fragmented, outdated thinking of the past – considering foreign affairs only as "reception," "ceremonial" work, or an auxiliary field. When foreign relations become a vital element, the inevitable rule is that it demands comprehensive, absolute, and direct leadership from the Party and unified management from the State, from the central level down to the grassroots.

It is from this mindset that Sub-national Diplomacy has emerged from the shadows to become a true frontline. While previously, local foreign relations were often limited to cultural exchanges, sister city agreements, or managing outgoing and incoming delegations at a purely administrative level, now the scope of activity has expanded extraordinarily. Section III.3 of the XIV Party Congress document sets the goal of double-digit economic growth, implementing four major transformations (digital, green, energy, and growth model), attracting investment into two national financial centers and eleven strategic technology groups (such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and semiconductors). Clearly, to realize these mega-projects, international investors will not only work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' meeting hall in the capital, but they will also directly negotiate on land, electricity infrastructure, tax policies, and human resources in specific provinces and cities. At this point, local diplomacy becomes the most practical point of contact, where handshakes between heads of state are transformed into billions of dollars of FDI flowing into the real economy.

3. IDENTIFYING BOILPOINTS AND THE CURRENT STATE OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS COORDINATION

Besides the brilliant achievements that have contributed to bringing the country "on par with the world's leading powers," the coordination between central ministries and agencies and local Party committees and governments is still revealing serious structural cracks. The frank analysis of these limitations is not intended to negate achievements, but to create a new mindset, in line with the spirit of "not wasting a single day, not delaying a single week" emphasized in the Draft.

The first serious bottleneck lies in the inequality and fragmentation in the organizational structure of foreign affairs at the local level. The document (Section III.6) openly points out the inadequacy of requiring professional training for staff, "especially in localities that currently do not have a Department of Foreign Affairs" (p. 8). The practical experience of state administration in recent years shows that the merger or failure to establish independent Departments of Foreign Affairs in many provinces and cities has led to the confinement of foreign affairs functions to a small department under the Provincial People's Committee Office. The consequences of this narrowing are enormous. Officials in charge of foreign affairs are caught up in internal administrative matters, lacking the time and space to study strategies and forecast international situations. When a locality needs to approach an international semiconductor technology corporation, or deal with a free migration crisis in a border area, the lack of an independent advisory body at the departmental level leaves the provincial government bewildered and lagging behind the changing times. This contradicts the principle of proactively preventing the risk of conflict and protecting the Fatherland early and from afar, as set forth by the 14th National Congress.

The second core bottleneck is the breakdown of the data ecosystem, leading to the formation of "information silos." The document emphasizes the need to: "Strengthen information sharing, connectivity, and data co-use in research, consultation, and policy planning, especially in interdisciplinary fields" (Section III.6, p. 8). However, current reality shows a deep division between ministries and agencies. Data on FDI enterprises are stored separately in the system of the Ministry of Planning and Investment; databases on overseas Vietnamese are scattered among the Fatherland Front, the Ministry of Public Security, and the Ministry of

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Foreign Affairs; and information on changes in green and core technologies is held by the Ministry of Science and Technology. The lack of a common data backbone leaves local policymakers like people groping in the fog. Without sufficient and timely economic intelligence from Vietnamese embassies abroad, localities are easily lured into attracting projects with outdated technology, causing environmental pollution, or become complacent about national security risks disguised as civilian investments.

The third bottleneck is the delay in coordinating the handling of complex foreign affairs issues (Security-Development Nexus). When complex disputes arise in the South China Sea, or conflicts of interest in the exploitation of transboundary Mekong River water resources occur, the application of legal and diplomatic tools based on international law (such as the 1982 UNCLOS Convention) is the responsibility of the central government. However, the direct consequences on the livelihoods of fishermen and the psychological stability of the public fall directly on the local authorities. Sometimes, coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Security, and local authorities remains reactive, lacking institutionalized inter-agency drills and standardized procedures. Delays or a lack of coordination in public statements, on-site handling, and people-to-people diplomacy can create loopholes that hostile forces can exploit to distort and undermine the Party's ideological foundation.

4. THE ROLE OF LOCALITIES AND ENTERPRISES AS SUBJECTS IN THE STRATEGIC AUTONOMY STRATEGY

To overcome the above obstacles, the theoretical thinking of the 14th Party Congress established a completely new position for localities and enterprises. This change is clearly demonstrated by the argument: "Promoting the role of the people, localities, and enterprises, as both direct implementers and beneficiaries of the results of foreign affairs and international integration" (Party Committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2026, p. 8). By acknowledging the position of "implementing subjects," the Central Committee has granted the grassroots level unprecedented strategic initiative.

In the field of diplomacy serving development (economic diplomacy, technology diplomacy), localities and enterprises are the ones who shoulder the mission of exploring new spaces for national survival. The document calls for expanding relations with partners not only at the national level but also with "major technology corporations... in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and semiconductors" (p. 6). In the fierce race to reposition global supply chains today, multinational corporations do not choose a country in general; they choose a specific geographical location that brings together a complete ecosystem: seaports, digital infrastructure, clean energy sources, and a proactive government environment. The proactive role of local diplomacy in reforming administrative procedures, preparing eco-industrial parks, and especially training high-quality human resources is the most attractive "soft power." Domestic technology enterprises, through diplomatic guidance, will gradually absorb core technologies, participate deeply in the value chain, thereby realizing President Ho Chi Minh's philosophy: "If you want others to help you, you must first help yourself" - the foundation of self-reliance in the new era. Furthermore, local authorities play a vital role in matters concerning overseas Vietnamese. The community of over 6 million overseas Vietnamese (according to the document in Section III.1) is not only a source of financial resources with enormous annual remittances, but also an invaluable network of knowledge and expertise. Overseas Vietnamese tend to have deep emotional ties to their homeland – the place where they were born. Therefore, local diplomacy must act as the most heartfelt bridge, removing administrative barriers related to civil registration and nationality, and creating a transparent and open investment environment so that overseas Vietnamese can confidently bring capital and technology back to develop their home provinces. Caring for and protecting the legitimate interests of overseas Vietnamese at the grassroots level is the most effective way to strengthen national unity and truly empower the people to benefit from the fruits of integration.

5. DESIGNING AN INTER-SECTORAL MATRIX COORDINATION MODEL IN NATIONAL FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Based on the analysis of the current situation and the role of the subjects, this study proposes building and applying an "Inter-sectoral Matrix Coordination" model to reshape the architecture of foreign affairs implementation. This model is designed based on the principle of centralized strategic leadership but dispersed and flexible tactical leadership, comprising two main axes.

The vertical axis is commanding and strategic advisory, extending from the Politburo and the Secretariat, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs acting as the central coordinating body, down to the Provincial and City Party Committees and People's Committees at all levels. This vertical axis absolutely ensures the principle of comprehensive Party leadership over the foreign affairs front, not allowing any "self-evolution" or deviation from the guidelines of the 14th Party Congress. For the vertical axis to operate effectively, Regulation 392 on the unified management of foreign affairs activities from the central to local levels must be further institutionalized and become a benchmark for evaluating the competence of local leaders.

The horizontal axis involves coordinated operations at the same administrative level. At the grassroots level, it is an organic, seamless coordination between the Department of Foreign Affairs (or the specialized foreign affairs agency) and the Provincial Military Command, the Provincial Police, the Department of Planning and Investment, and the local Business Association. This horizontal mechanism aims to create an immediate response. For example, research proposes the establishment of an "Inter-agency Task Force" in key localities. When an unexpected event occurs, such as foreign vessels violating maritime sovereignty or a supply chain disruption affecting hundreds of thousands of workers in industrial zones, this Task Force will activate a mechanism for immediate information sharing. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the central level will conduct official diplomatic engagements;

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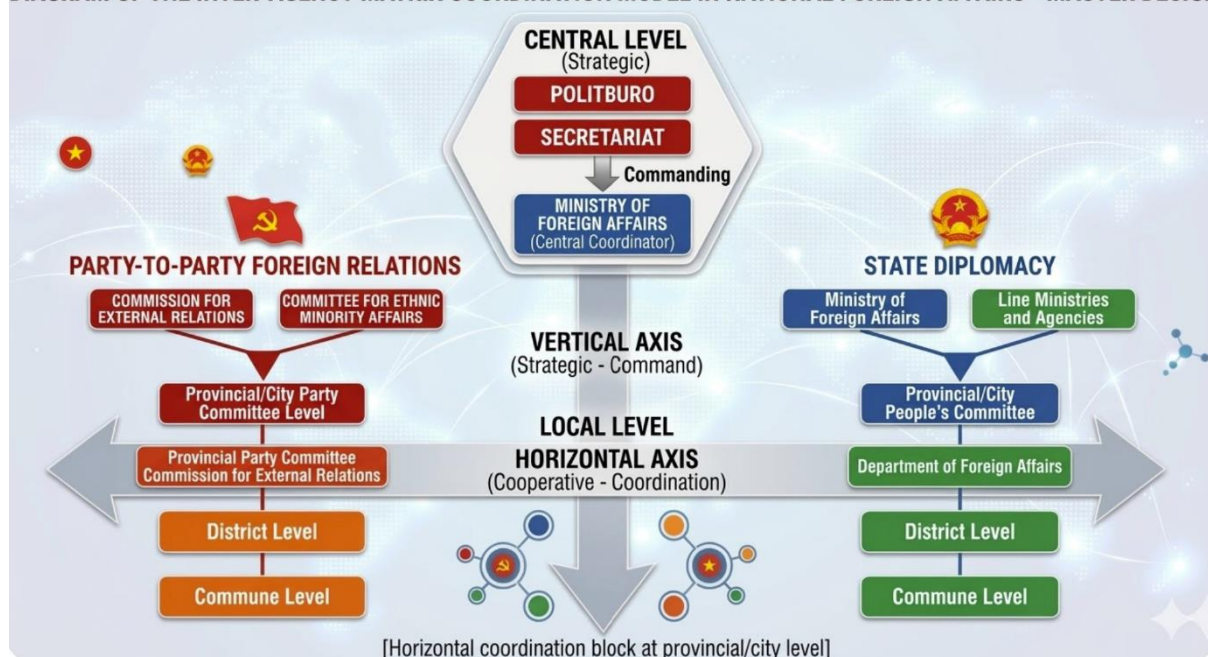
meanwhile, at the local level, the military and police maintain stability and security on the ground, while civilian agencies implement measures to reassure the public and support businesses in finding alternative sources of raw materials.

In particular, this model requires establishing a direct and substantive connection mechanism between the 94 Vietnamese representative offices abroad and each specific locality. Embassies and consulates should not only perform traditional state diplomatic duties but also operate as "economic consulates," establishing specialized "Desks" to support key economic regions in the country. Diplomats will play a role in market research, assessing the legal risks of foreign partners and directly transmitting this data package to provincial authorities, helping localities to screen and select truly capable strategic investors, avoiding "illusory" projects.

DIAGRAM OF THE INTER-SECTORAL MATRIX COORDINATION MODEL IN NATIONAL FOREIGN AFFAIRS

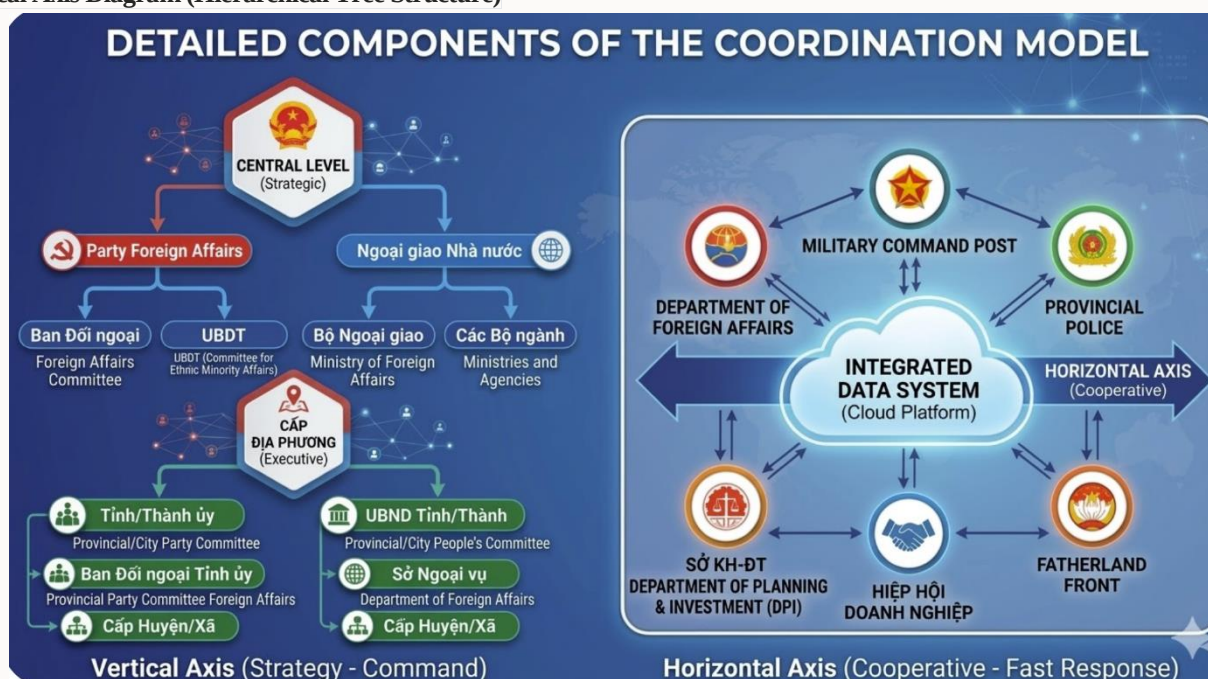
A. OVERALL DESIGN (2D Matrix Form)

DIAGRAM OF THE INTER-AGENCY MATRIX COORDINATION MODEL IN NATIONAL FOREIGN AFFAIRS - MASTER DESIGN



B. DETAILS OF EACH COMPONENT

1. Vertical Axis Diagram (Hierarchical Tree Structure)

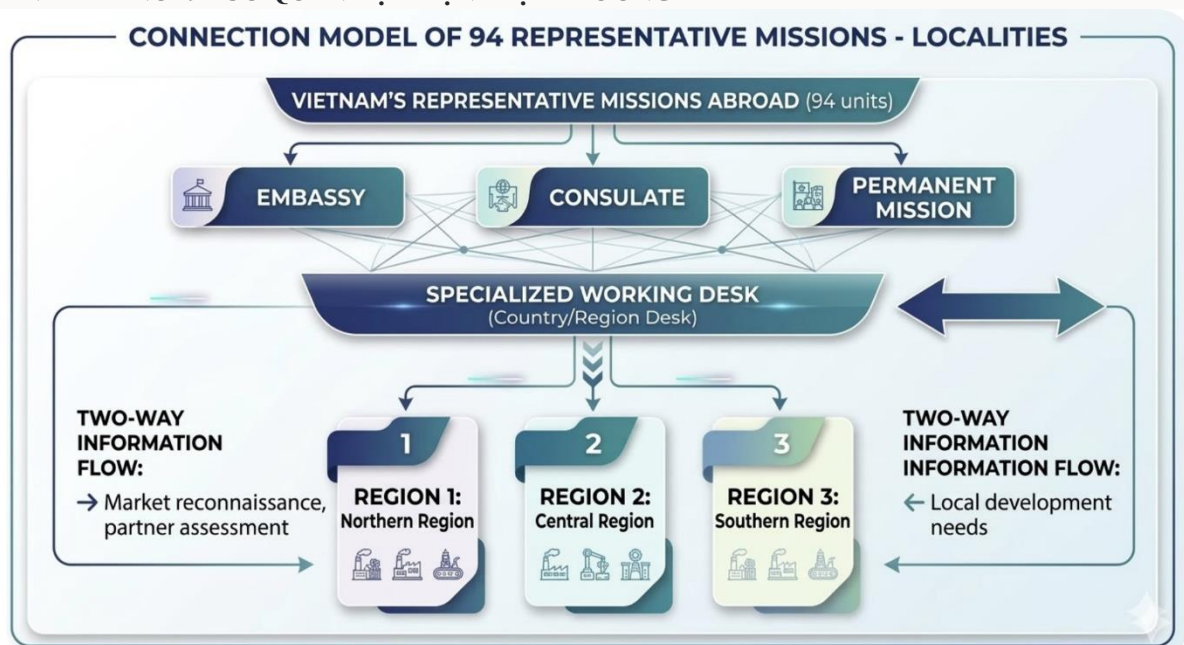


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2. Sơ đồ Trục Ngang (Dạng mạng lưới)



C. MÔ HÌNH KẾT NỐI 94 CƠ QUAN ĐẠI DIỆN - ĐỊA PHƯƠNG



D. ADVANTAGES OF THIS MODEL DESIGN:

1. **Visual appeal:** Easily identifies collaborative relationships
2. **Systemic nature:** Clearly demonstrates both vertical (hierarchical) and horizontal (interconnected) aspects
3. **Flexibility:** Allows adjustments to suit local specifics
4. **Modernity:** Integrates digital transformation elements (Cloud, Real-time data)
5. **Practicality:** Accurately reflects the current organizational structure of Vietnam

6. INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND OPTIMIZATION OF NATIONAL RESOURCES IN THE NEW ERA

Great policies can only become great realities when guaranteed by transparent institutions and abundant resources. Following the action guidelines in Section III of the Draft, this article proposes the following comprehensive and decisive system of solutions:

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Firstly, in terms of institutional creation and codification, the most urgent task is to realize specific mechanisms to support integration. According to the document, the National Assembly plans to issue Resolution 250 in December 2025 on specific mechanisms for implementing international integration (Party Committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2026, p. 7). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs needs to urgently coordinate with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Finance to issue guiding decrees, granting greater autonomy to localities in proactively managing their budgets to promote international investment, hiring high-quality foreign language experts, or even establishing provincial trade promotion representative offices in key markets. At the same time, the Ministry of Interior needs to study and issue a circular mandating the restoration and restructuring of the Foreign Affairs Department in strategically located localities (border areas, coastal areas, high-tech zones). For provinces that do not yet meet the requirements, it is mandatory to establish independent Foreign Affairs Offices, clearly defining the ranks of foreign affairs specialists with strict standards regarding political theory, foreign language proficiency, and understanding of international law.

Secondly, a breakthrough in digital transformation and the creation of a National Foreign Affairs Data Ecosystem is necessary. To thoroughly address the "information enclave" problem, priority should be given to funding the construction of a "Database for security and safety based on the digital architecture framework of the diplomatic sector" (as stipulated in Section III.4). This system must be designed on a national cloud computing platform, allowing cross-access between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other ministries, departments, and localities. Information on international commitments, FDI data, border security and order, exchange rate fluctuations, and tax policies of major powers will be updated in real time. Sharing this data will help local leaders grasp the overall geopolitical landscape, thereby making accurate and transparent economic cooperation decisions, eliminating the risk of project duplication between neighboring provinces and wasting national resources. The coordinated efforts of the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Information and Communications are key to ensuring absolute security for this digital platform.

Thirdly, a revolution in the training, development, and utilization of strategic-level foreign affairs talent is necessary. A modern system cannot be operated by people with outdated thinking. The documents of the 14th National Congress require the building of a team of cadres who are "both politically sound and professionally competent... daring to think, daring to act, and daring to innovate" (p. 7). A practical solution is to eliminate the distinction between central-level diplomatic cadres and local-level foreign affairs cadres. A mechanism for periodic rotation should be established: bringing outstanding cadres from the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Planning and Investment to work in the Departments and Bureaus of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or sending them on term assignments to Vietnamese representative offices abroad; conversely, bringing veteran diplomats to lead local areas to convey a macro-level vision. Only in this way can we form a generation of comprehensive leaders who are sensitive to the pulse of the global economy but still closely follow the realities of people's lives.

Fourth, ensure strategically significant financial resources. A pioneering diplomacy cannot exist without adequate investment. The article fully agrees with the document's bold direction: "striving to ensure that by 2030, the proportion of resources allocated to foreign affairs is equivalent to the average level of leading ASEAN countries" (p. 7). Budget allocation for foreign affairs at the local level should be considered a "development investment expenditure" rather than a "recurrent expenditure". The State should allow localities to pilot the establishment of Public Diplomacy Support Funds, mobilizing social resources from large private corporations to participate in promoting culture and trade abroad. The satisfaction of the people, the increase in export turnover, and the inflow of high-quality FDI capital should be used as KPIs to measure the effectiveness of budget utilization for foreign affairs activities at the local level.

7. CONCLUSION

A new era of national development for Vietnam is unfolding, presenting countless brilliant opportunities intertwined with existential challenges. In the context of a constantly evolving world, the foreign policy guidelines of the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam have set historical milestones, positioning foreign affairs as a "crucial and ongoing" front and firmly adhering to the principle of "strategic autonomy."

However, this grand plan can only truly shine when it is deeply rooted in practice through the concerted efforts of the entire political system. Elevating the coordination between the "Three Pillars" of foreign affairs and local diplomacy is no longer a purely methodological issue, but has become a practical imperative. By resolutely removing institutional and organizational bottlenecks at the grassroots level, breaking down data barriers to build a convergent information ecosystem, and empowering localities, businesses, and citizens with genuine autonomy, we are gradually building a comprehensive, modern diplomacy deeply rooted in the "Vietnamese bamboo" identity.

With the direct and comprehensive leadership of the Central Party Committee, strong support from the State through a flexible legal framework (such as Resolution 250 of the National Assembly), and the unwavering support of the people, Vietnam's foreign policy front, from the macro to the micro level, will undoubtedly generate new impetus. This combined force will be a solid shield protecting the Fatherland from early on and from afar, while also serving as a sharp spearhead to attract maximum resources of the

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era, contributing to the successful fulfillment of the mission of leading Vietnam forward steadily, standing shoulder to shoulder with the world's leading powers in the new era of development.

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