1. Vietnam to Benefit from the TPP Agreement

After five years of negotiations with countless disagreements and obstacles, trade ministers of 12 member states to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement, including Vietnam, has reached the final consensus on the world's largest free trade agreement (FTA) on October 05, 2015. Before the agreement is officially signed, TPP must be approved by the heads and parliaments of the 12 member states' countries.

The TPP Agreement has a chapter on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) which sets out the basic rights and obligations of TPP countries when putting in place technical regulations and standards. These technical requirements take a wide range of forms and include design and content requirements, safety standards and testing procedures. Technical requirements are supported by assessment and certification procedures.

The TBT chapter does not take away Vietnam's right to impose technical requirements, standards or labels to products imported and sold in the country. It does not create technical requirements or standards for specific products. Its primary aim is to facilitate trade, including by eliminating discriminatory barriers to trade and those that are more trade restrictive than necessary. It also enhances transparency and promotes good practice and greater regulatory cooperation.

The countries participating in the TPP are important export partners of Vietnam, particularly the US and Japan. Up to 40 percent of Vietnam's export goods are to the other 11 countries participating in the TPP, i.e. Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and the US. Many exports are subject to TBT, often referred to as non-tariff barriers (NTBs), in the form of licences, technical requirements and standards or labelling requirements.

According to many businesses, the greatest deterrent to exporting is the complexity of the regulations they face entering new markets. Reducing unnecessary NTBs and improving access to information on technical requirements and certification procedures will reduce transaction costs to the benefit of Vietnamese exporters. Closer cooperation between TPP parties on technical regulations and a better understanding of each TPP Party's regulatory systems will also improve public safety and benefit Vietnamese consumers.

Incorporating the WTO TBT Agreement

The WTO TBT Agreement commits members to apply technical regulations in ways that are non-discriminatory, do not create unnecessary barriers to trade, and based on international standards. The TPP reaffirms these obligations and extends the level of commitment on the development of international standards, guides and recommendations. The Chapter acknowledges that such standards support greater regulatory alignment and good regulatory practice.

Conformity assessment

The Chapter builds on the WTO TBT Agreement's commitment on conformity assessments. These are the processes used to determine whether a product meets the technical requirements for entry into a market. The additional commitments encourage information sharing and engagement between TPP parties, including additional procedures to review complaints and the treatment of conformity assessment bodies outside the importing TPP Party's territory. TPP parties are encouraged to enter into mutual recognition agreements for bodies responsible for setting standards and making assessments, and to improve transparency regarding the reasons for refusal of recognition of conformity. Consistent

with WTO rules, fees for any assessment of conformity would be charged based on the cost of services rendered.

Compliance period for technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures

The Chapter establishes timeframes for the entry into force of new or altered regulations. It also provides exporters with a reasonable time period to demonstrate the conformity of their goods with the relevant technical requirements.

Cooperation, trade facilitation, and transparency

The Chapter encourages TPP parties to take into account the mechanisms that exist to ensure products conform to their technical requirements. This could include the mutual recognition of standard setting bodies in each other's territories or adopting existing regional and international mutual recognition arrangements. TPP parties recognise the importance of exchanging information to improve, promote and harmonise good regulatory practice across the region. Cooperating more closely on technical standards and harmonising approaches to conformity assessment reduces the complexity of requirements across the region, leading to lower costs of doing business.

The Chapter aims to improve transparency in the development and imposition of technical regulations in TPP countries. It commits TPP parties to allowing members of the public to provide comments on in the development of technical regulations. The Chapter also requires TPP parties to publish proposals for new or updated technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures in sufficient detail to allow others to assess the impact on trade.

Information Exchange and Technical Discussions

The Chapter provides the right to request information on any issue arising under the Chapter, with the aim of improving the information flow between TPP parties. The TPP Party responding to such a request is obliged to provide information within a reasonable period of time. TPP parties can also request technical discussions on issues that have an impact on trade.

Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade

A TBT Committee will be established, comprising representatives from all TPP Parties. The Committee's responsibilities will include promoting good regulatory practice, monitoring the implementation of the commitments in the Chapter, providing a conduit for technical discussions, and encouraging cooperation between governments and non-governmental bodies.

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2. International Standards Lead SMEs to Success

Many small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Korea have grown rapidly after turning their self-developed technologies into international standards. And there are many more SMEs in Korea competitive enough to follow suit.

SME leaders are therefore called on to be self-motivated, understand the importance and value of international standards and make continued investments in them, although it takes time to see returns. The government and relevant state bodies, including the Korean Agency for Technology and Standards (KATS) are urged to set aside a sufficient budget and workforce to help promising SMEs. According to data from the KATS, at least five SMEs have successfully registered their self-developed technologies as international standards. The registration has awarded them greater access to overseas markets.

www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/biz/2015/09/123_186978.html

3. The Newly Revised ISO 14001

One of the world's most popular standards for environmental management has just been revised, with key improvements that make it fit for the future.

ISO 14001:2015, which sets out the requirements for an environmental management standard, is one of the world's most widely used standards and a key business tool for many organisations. A newly revised version has just been published, to ensure it remains relevant to the marketplace. ISO 14001:2015 responds to the latest trends, such as an increasing recognition by companies of the need to factor in both external and internal elements that influence their impact, including climate volatility.

Other key improvements in the new version include:
- A greater commitment from leadership
- An increased alignment with strategic direction
- Greater protection for the environment, with a focus on proactive initiatives
- More effective communication, driven through a communications strategy
- Life-cycle thinking, considering each stage of a product or service, from development to end-of-life

The revision is the culmination of work done by 121 expert members of the technical committee ISO/TC 207/SC 1 for environmental development, which is led by British Standards Institute (BSI), the ISO member for the UK, representing multiple stakeholder groups from 88 countries.

www.iso.org/iso/home/news_index/news_archive/news.htm?refid=Ref1999

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4. Poor Awareness on the Importance of Standards

The level of awareness among Bhutanese on the need for standards and the importance of using certified products are poor. To ensure that certified products are used, those preparing tender documents should include that it is mandatory for bidders to use brands that are Bhutan Standards Bureau (BSB) approved.

To enhance the standardisation process and learn from international experiences, BSB has established link with several national and international standards bodies in the region and the world. A bilateral co-operation agreement with the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has recently been signed. BSB also signed Memorandum of Understanding with the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute and ASTM International, US.

www.kuenselonline.com/poor-awareness-on-the-importance-of-standards/

5. ISO/IEC Guide and the Consumer

An ISO/IEC Guide to developing service standards for consumers is not only beneficial for standards developers, but is also undoubtedly of value to service providers in reducing customer complaints and cutting the business costs of poor service.

The ISO/IEC Guide 76:2008, *Development of service standards – Recommendations for addressing consumer issues*, provides an introduction to how the key consumer principles relate to standards development. These principles are safety, information, choice, the right to be heard, access, fairness, quality, redress, environmental issues and compliance with laws and regulations.
www.iso.org/iso/home/news_index/news_archive/news.htm?refid=Ref1103

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6. Planting a Seed for Higher Standards in Indian Agriculture

The controversy earlier in 2015 around Nestle's Maggi noodles in India has brought the country's guidelines on food safety under scrutiny. While the Nestle noodle tangle remains to be resolved, the debate has highlighted that one key element lacking in India's food safety norms is standardisation.

In India, while it is mandatory for exporters to comply with Codex Alimentarius - the highest food safety standard globally, this is not the case for products meant for the domestic market. In February 2013, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) said that it would align India's food safety standards for vegetables, fruits and other food products produced and sold in India with Codex.

However, this has not been put in place as yet.
http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/planting-a-seed-for-higher-standards-in-indian-agriculture/

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7. MasterCard Pushes for Industry Standardisation

MasterCard is making yet another big move in the financial technology scene with a push for industry standardisation. Online redemptions for customer loyalty programmes already exist to an extent within the existing retailer payment system. MasterCard hopes to bring this system to an industry standard for point-of-sale checkouts on mobile apps.

MasterCard notes that loyalty programmes already exist to a certain extent but that some businesses struggle to offer these services through mobile app payments. The credit card company wants to establish one standard for mobile payment loyalty rewards through its app, bringing seamless functionality to vendors.

Retailers hoping to retain or attract new customers will have access to a suite of tools through MasterCard's app that can be tailored to the retailer's specific needs, while also meeting one industry standard across the board.
http://paymentweek.com/2015-11-20-mastercard-pushes-for-industry-standardization-8921/

8. ISO to Standardise Feed Processing Machinery

The ISO is looking to harmonise feed machinery manufacturing practices worldwide. The world's soaring population and growing demand for animal protein products has spurred enormous development in feed machinery manufacturing and the feed industry in general. But with policies and technologies differing widely across countries, there is a substantial imbalance in the field.

The ISO said inconsistent requirements have hindered international trading of feed machinery and there is urgent demand for global standards to coordinate business across borders.

The ISO said three groups have been created within ISO/TC 293 to work specifically on feed machinery terminology, safety and hygiene with the following aims:

- Develop international standards on terminology and graphical symbols, safety, hygiene and test methods for technical requirements, as well as the performance of single equipment and feed production lines that can impact on feed quality, production efficiency and energy consumption.
- Facilitate international exchanges on technical issues, promote international trade, minimise security risks in the feed production process, as well as the risks inherent to feed hygiene, workplace sanitation and environment pollution.
- Propose the best solutions for the security and hygiene of feed machinery.
- Supply the technical basis for conformity assessment and provide an impartial technological foundation for orders, project inspections and acceptance of complex production lines.

The organisation also hopes, at a later stage, to focus on the intelligence of feed processing lines and service networks.

www.feednavigator.com/Regulation/ISO-looks-to-standardize-feed-processing-machinery

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9. SLSI Holds a Vehicle Procession to Bring Quality Awareness

A vehicle procession organised by the Sri Lanka Standards Institution (SLSI) to bring awareness among the public on the importance of quality and the standardisation was held under the patronage of the Minister of Technology and Research Susil Premajayantha recently.

This programme was implemented in cooperation with the institutions who have succeeded in their businesses by joining with the SLSI whose mission is to undertake, promote and facilitate Standardisation, Measurement, Quality Assurance and related activities in all sectors of the national economy in order to:

- iIncrease productivity and maximise the utilisation of resources
- facilitate internal and external trade
- achieve socio-economic development
- enhance international competitiveness of products and services
- safeguard the interest of consumers whilst improving the quality of life of employees of the Institution

www.news.lk/news/political-current-affairs/item/11187-slsi-holds-a-vehicle-procession-to-bring-awareness-on-quality-and-standardization

10. Free Trade Agreement between EU and Vietnam

EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia **Malmström** and Vietnamese Minister of Industry and Trade Vu Huy **Hoang** agreed in principle on a comprehensive and ambitious trade and investment agreement. The final legal texts will have to be ironed out by negotiators after the summer break, but the substance of the deal has been agreed. This FTA, for which negotiations started in October 2012, is the most ambitious and comprehensive FTA that the EU has ever concluded with a developing country. This agreement will allow EU exporters and investors to access a fast-growing market of 90 million people and to consolidate their presence in one of the most dynamic regions in the world.

The EU and Vietnam have agreed on a robust and comprehensive chapter on trade and sustainable development, with an extensive list of commitments including:

- Commitment to the effective implementation by each Party of the ILO core labour standards, ratified ILO Conventions (not only the fundamental ones) and ratified Multilateral Environmental Agreements and to ratification of not yet ratified fundamental ILO Conventions.
- Obligations not to derogate from and to effectively enforce domestic labour and environmental laws to attract trade and investment – in other words prohibition of social and environmental dumping.
- Promotion of Corporate Social Responsibility, including references to international instruments in this regard.
- A dedicated article on climate change and commitments to the conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity (including wildlife), forestry (including illegal logging), and fisheries.
- Mechanisms for the involvement of civil society in the implementation of the chapter, both by each side domestically (consultation of 'domestic advisory groups') and by the EU and Vietnam jointly (meetings of a 'joint forum'), and several provisions enhancing transparency and accountability

http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-5468_en.htm