



EU Domestic Advisory Group under
the EU-Vietnam FTA

Letter from the European Union Domestic Advisory Group under the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement

Brussels, 14 July 2021
External Relations(2021)D/1889

BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis,
Dear Chief Trade Enforcement Officer Denis Redonnet,

The EU Domestic Advisory Group (DAG) set up under Chapter 13 of the EU-Vietnam has received concerning reports of the **the arrest** announced on 2nd July 2021 by Security Police in Hanoi of two prominent civil society activists, journalist **Mai Phan Lợi**, chair of the Scientific Board of the [Centre for Media in Educating Community \(MEC\)](#) and lawyer **Đặng Đình Bách**, director of the [Law and Policy for Sustainable Development \(LPSD\)](#).

Mai Phan Lợi, 50, is a specialist in the press and social media. Before founding MEC, he ran the “*Young Journalists’ Forum*”, an unofficial group with 33 000 members, mostly journalists and students of journalism, and a public forum entitled “*From the Press and Citizens’ Perspective*” which has 120 000 members. He was Hanoi Bureau chief of the Ho Chi Minh City Law Magazine (*Pháp Luật*). In 2016, his press card was revoked and he was accused of “*gravely dishonouring the Vietnam People’s Army*” after he conducted a poll on Facebook about incidents involving Vietnamese naval aircraft. He was amongst the civil society activists invited to meet President Obama during his trip to Vietnam in 2016. Mai Phan Lợi, who also writes on social media under the name “*Ink Brush*” (*Bút Lông*), was in fact arrested on 24 June 2021 and detained for a week without charge before Police officially announced the investigation against him on 2 July.

Lawyer **Đặng Đình Bách**, 43, is a defender of environmental rights. He is not recognized as a member of the dissident community, focusing rather on training and educational activities to help communities understand and protect their rights. His website’s mission statement states that “*LPSD aims to become a major data bank and research centre on violations of the rights*



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and interests of people due to the adverse impacts of industrial development and modernisation. When people understand their rights and legitimate interests and know how to exercise those rights, the law and policy is no longer just on paper but actually into the life of the people”.

Mai Phan Lợi and Đặng Đình Bách are both Executive Board members of VNGO-EVFTA Network, a group of seven development and environmental CSOs established last November to raise awareness about EVFTA and its civil society component in Vietnam, the Vietnam Domestic Advisory Group (DAG). All seven of the organizations (including MEC and LPSD) submitted applications for membership of the Vietnam DAG (1), but have received no reply. Now two of their members are under arrest.

After the publication of this news by Vietnam Committee on Human Rights (VCHR), at 4.30 pm Paris time on 8.7.2021 with a link to the Network of Vietnamese non-government organisations on Europe-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (VNGO-EVFTA) inaugural meeting on the Centre for Sustainable Rural Development (SRD) website (<http://www.srd.org.vn/index.php/thu-vi-n-nh-menu/1324-h-p-bdh-1>), **Mai Phan Lợi (MEC) and Đặng Đình Bách (LPSD) have been removed from the list** (see screen capture of the original press release below).

Sau cuộc họp khởi động thành lập mạng lưới ngày 16 tháng 11, toàn bộ thành viên mạng lưới đã thông nhất để cử 7 tổ chức tham gia ban điều hành (BDH) mạng lưới, danh sách cụ thể như sau:

TT	Tổ chức	Đại diện
1.	Trung tâm Phát triển Nông thôn bền vững (SRD)	Bà Vũ Thị Bích Hợp/Ông Nguyễn Phú Hùng
2.	Hội chủ rừng Việt Nam	Ông Nguyễn Bá Ngãi
3.	Trung tâm Nghiên cứu Pháp luật và Chính sách Phát triển bền vững (LPSD)	Ông Đặng Đình Bách
4.	Trung tâm Bảo tồn Thiên nhiên GAIA (GAIA)	Bà Đỗ Thị Thanh Huyền
5.	Trung tâm Phát triển cộng đồng bền vững (SCODE)	Bà Ngô Thị Lan Phương
6.	Trung tâm Truyền thông giáo dục cộng đồng (MEC)	Ông Mai Phan Lợi
7.	Hội Khoa học kỹ thuật Lâm nghiệp Đắk Lắk	Ông Trần Ngọc Thanh

This is the censored version:



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As you will recall, at the beginning of June, the EU DAG took the unusual step of issuing a [statement](#) about the creation of the counterpart DAG in Vietnam. *“Civil society engagement and scrutiny of the EVFTA is not an optional element of the agreement”* as recalled by the EU DAG last month, but is actually an essential element of the agreement¹.

We reiterate the importance of civil society space and the inclusion of independent civil society organisations in the DAGs as mandated by the FTA’s Trade and Sustainable Development chapter.

The EU DAG unanimously urge you, as Trade Commissioner of the European Commission, to raise those cases with the Vietnamese authorities and ask them to provide explanations at the up-coming first meeting of FTA Trade Committee on 19th July 2021.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Judith Kirton-Darling

Chair of the EU DAG for EU-Vietnam DAG on behalf of the whole EU DAG

Cc: Mr Bernd Lange, Chair of the EP Committee on International Trade
Mr Geert Bourgeois, EP Rapporteur on EU-Vietnam FTA/IPA

¹ See chapter 13 as well as article 17.22 and 17.18 of the EU-Vietnam FTA.