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Vietnam's Exports To US Soar After Pact - Former Trade Rep

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HANOI (AP)--Vietnam's exports to the U.S. have risen six-fold since the former foes signed a landmark agreement four years ago, but the communist country faces growing competition from China, a former senior U.S. trade official said Tuesday.

Vietnam's shipments to the U.S. have jumped to US\$5 billion since the 2001 pact, said Charlene Barshefsky, the former U.S. trade representative who negotiated the agreement.

America is now Vietnam's biggest export market.

"Vietnamese exporters have surpassed the farmers and factories of such longtime American trade partners as Turkey, South Africa, Poland and Argentina and are now approaching those of major developed countries like Australia and Spain," she told a group of businesspeople in Hanoi.

She said Vietnam has a lot more to gain by obtaining admission to the World Trade Organization, which it hopes to do this year. But the country also must struggle to compete with neighboring China, a dilemma also facing the U.S.

"Vietnam's own emergence as an exporter and an investment site is happening at the same time as China's emergence," Barshefsky said, adding that Vietnam must rapidly enact economic reforms to lure foreign investors.


Rampant software, film and music piracy must also be tackled for the country to woo more high-tech companies, she said.

Barshefsky said Vietnam benefits from a strong standing with the American public.

A recent U.S. poll found that two-thirds of Americans are happy with trade growth since the agreement was signed and an overwhelming number of Americans also support Vietnam's entry into the WTO, Barshefsky said.

"Other than Great Britain, no country ranks this high in American public opinion," she said. "This is really quite remarkable."

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