

ASEAN's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Political and Security Sector

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Abstract

The end of 2019 to continue the beginning of 2020, the world has been shocked by a new type of virus that at that time could not be identified and occurred for the first time in China. With the development of its transmission, the COVID-19 virus or corona virus is classified as a virus that spreads rapidly. High transmission of course affects areas bordering or with high mobility charts, such as South Korea, Japan and Italy. Responding to the coronavirus case, the World Health Organization (WHO) has taken many actions. One of them is holding a meeting of virologists and disease management through various media, directly or indirectly, to identify the possibility of the corona virus occurring and being contagious. This is a challenge that must be resolved by many countries. Empathy and solidarity between countries are considered as the first steps to reduce the number of infections. In this regard, regional international organizations such as ASEAN have an important role to play in resolving this problem. The purpose of this journal article is made to see the response given by international organizations in the ASEAN region, in the political and security sector during the coronavirus pandemic.

I. INTRODUCTION

The starting point for the emergence of this virus is in China. The spread is considered very fast, because less than one month after the first case in China, countries that intersect with China and have high mobility traffic also found their first cases. More than a hundred countries and territories reported their first cases, not significantly different. Judging from the number of cases, it is evident that countries with a global level of activity have more cases. Especially if the traffic is created due to tourism. Such as Europe and Southeast Asia.

With a population that is considered more dense among other regions, the impact experienced by the Southeast Asia region is quite large and can be considered significant. The state initiative in carrying out the closure or limiting the activities of

their country, overwhelms many parties to maintain their economy, because of the decrease in income due to the number of limited jobs and the occurrence of unilateral termination of employment. Fields that have had a drastic impact include tourism, retail, product delivery, industry, and so on.

ASEAN is an international organization in the Southeast Asia region. After the determination of the global pandemic by WHO, ASEAN took firm steps, namely discussing the problems they face, in accordance with the latest data updates. On April 14, 2020, ASEAN succeeded in holding a High Level Conference (Summit) on the latest issue, namely the corona virus outbreak (COVID-19). This conference is held virtually to avoid virus transmission. Countries involved in this agenda are member countries and three partner countries (China, Japan and

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The response of ASEAN as a regional international organization to the corona virus outbreak is very important to know. The benefit of member countries depends on how ASEAN facilitates member countries to be able to communicate and cooperate. The highlighted point is that ASEAN must take part in controlling the international pandemic situation and try to establish emergency cooperation, especially in the field of global health. Such action must be taken even though in reality, there are many considerations and compromises that occur to reach a common consensus, such as differences in political systems, social norms, national interests, and crisis conditions.

After ASEAN's response has reached its consensus, then the next step is realization in the form of concrete actions. The following initiatives from the summit are the establishment of the ASEAN COVID-19 Response Fund and the ASEAN Center For Infectious Diseases. These two sub-sectors are concerned with the economy (emergency assistance funds) and health. On the one hand, this sub-sector looks very promising, but on the

other hand, learning from the handling of the previous pandemic, the initiative to form a new sectoral body, did not go properly. The expected effectiveness does not work properly because each country has its own substantive problems [1].

The policy making/response process and decision making can be categorized into several points, among others;

- I. Policy perspective. In making it, it can be said that policies also have stages. First, learning must be done, extracting more information related to the issues discussed. Second, there will be discussion of agreements and negotiations. Third, disseminate and exchange ideas across governments.
- II. Crisis response and management. Response in this aspect is different because conditions that occur in each country are different. Therefore, ASEAN becomes a forum to bring these differences together and summarize them into one outline as a general regional response, at the end.
- III. Global policy making and transnational administration.
- IV. Policy network approach.
- V. Administration and implementation.

The COVID-19 virus has become a disaster that greatly affects countries in various parts of the world. Many world orders have changed, since the COVID-19 virus was confirmed as a virus that endangers the world today. The COVID-19 virus presents a challenge for every country to take steps to break the spread of the COVID-19 chain. Every country, especially countries in Southeast Asia, has experienced changes and problems in every area of the life of the nation and state, especially problems in the political and security fields. With this background, this discussion looks at how ASEAN responds and determines policies related to COVID-19 in the political and security fields.

I. FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM

There are two important points that form the problem formulation and discussion limits in this journal article, namely:

1. How will ASEAN respond as a regional organization to address the issue of the COVID-19 virus pandemic in the political and security sector?
2. How are the efforts to handle ASEAN member countries that have the same response as the ASEAN Political-Security Community in dealing with COVID-19?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The first literature review related to this research was a journal written by Calvin with the title Handling COVID-19 Related To Regional Security According To ASEAN Political-Security Community in 2020 which was published in the journal of the Faculty of Law, Atma Jaya Catholic University [2]. This journal discusses the handling efforts made by ASEAN member countries from the point of view of state security. This journal uses a juridical-normative conceptual framework. In addition to the discussion in accordance with this writing, this journal has the advantage of providing complete and easy to understand information. Therefore, this journal is considered very helpful in doing this writing. The conclusion that is considered important by the authors of this journal is the emphasis that this coronavirus has enormous side effects and impacts for every country, especially in the fields of politics and security. ASEAN chose the first step by issuing a travel ban policy, and always implemented a minimum distance. Then, the formation of the ASEAN Political-Security Community with the aim of maintaining peace and security in the Southeast Asia region has an obligation to make efforts to monitor member countries in updating data. To carry out the response and policies that have been set by ASEAN, this organization also asks member countries to prioritize common interests and be responsible for

protecting their respective countries, making efforts to control the transmission of the COVID-19 virus.

The second literature review used for this writing is a journal entitled The ASEAN's Responses to COVID-19: A Policy Sciences Analysis written by several authors, namely Riyanti Djalante from the United Nations University, Laely Nurhidayah from the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, Jonatan A. Lassa from Charles Darwin University and Hoang Van Minh from Hanoi University of Public Health [3]. This journal first describes the general impact of COVID-19 on Southeast Asia. It was explained that in general, the COVID-19 virus had the most impact on health and the economy. In addition, this journal explains the comparison between the responses of each of the 10 ASEAN countries and their policies in overcoming COVID-19. It turns out that there are similar steps in each country to respond and take policies to overcome the coronavirus pandemic.

Because the journal provides a summary table in the form of responses from 10 ASEAN countries in dealing with COVID-19. For example, all ASEAN countries are implementing responses in the form of cross-border closings, travel restrictions for entry restrictions, non-essential business closures, schools and other public places, quarantine or closure and lockdown, and providing economic stimulus. It's just that the application of the time is different according to when the cases entered each country and how many cases there are. The advantages of this journal are sufficiently detailed to explain the responses of each country to COVID-19 because it is explained one by one the 10 ASEAN countries ranging from Brunei to Indonesia. Then the reason why this journal is important in this writing is because in this journal it states how science in seeing policies can be used to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The important conclusion of this journal is that strengthening future cooperation must

continue to be carried out by recognizing a more coherent, multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder and ASEAN community-wide approach in ensuring ASEAN equality of timely and effective responses to this pandemic.

III. ANALYSIS

A. ASEAN's response in addressing the issue of the COVID-19 virus pandemic in the political and security fields

ASEAN organizations in an effort to address problems or challenges related to the political and security sector. has an APSC (ASEAN Political-Security Community) which is included in the three pillars of integration [4]. Since the beginning, the APSC has agreed to discuss and find solutions to problems or challenges in the political and security sector. With APSC, it is hoped that member countries can work together in realizing Southeast Asia as a cohesive, peaceful, stable and resilient region in realizing security [4]. APSC will move if there are many ASEAN member countries that are facing similar problems or challenges. This is due to the position of ASEAN and APSC being under member countries. So that if there is a collective initiative from member countries, APSC can be a means to channel problems and alternative recommendations.

The collective problem that ASEAN member countries are facing in 2020 is the COVID-19 pandemic. All ASEAN member countries must strive to minimize the impact of the pandemic in various fields. including politics and security. Various actions such as lockdowns, restrictions on the mobility of people, and travel tires have been carried out in several ASEAN member countries. However, these ASEAN member countries move with their respective interests and regulations and of course are inward looking. Therefore, member countries need to formulate joint decisions in dealing with the impact of the COVID-19

pandemic through ASEAN, especially APSC.

The decision-making process within all ASEAN organizational lines, including APSC, uses a collective agreement or consensus model between member countries. This consensus applies to every ASEAN sub-organization and activity, including the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC). The decision-making model has also been regulated in Chapter VII Article 20 paragraphs 1-4 of the ASEAN Charter [5]. The article also states that if a collective agreement cannot be reached, then the decision will be determined through the ASEAN Summit [5]. In addition, in making decisions and meeting events, ASEAN member countries must pay attention to the principles set out in Chapter I Article 2 of the ASEAN Charter. Some of these principles are non-intervention, equal respect for all members, and collective responsibility in regional peace and security [5].

APSC in a COVID-19 pandemic situation needs to strive to accommodate all the problems of each member and issue collective recommendations. In its efforts, APSC supervises several meetings such as the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting (AFMM), the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM), and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) [5]. The meeting aims to discuss the problems at hand from the perspective of various fields, such as defense and international relations. The outcomes of the meetings under APSC are neither binding nor lenient. So that the results of the meeting do not violate the principles contained in the ASEAN Charter.

ASEAN member countries must create awareness to participate in meetings in the APSC. This awareness has been agreed upon and contained in the principles of the ASEAN Charter. The awareness of attending the meeting is also proof that member countries also see a problem from the perspective of ASEAN as a whole and are not inward looking. In the

field of politics and security, ASEAN member countries must attend and be active in various meetings related to the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC). As of June 2020, it was recorded that two meetings were held that were related and supervised by APSC.

On February 20, 2020, a meeting of foreign ministers of ASEAN member countries and China, Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting on the Coronavirus Disease 2019 was held in Vientiane, Lao People's Democratic Republic [6]. The meeting was held specifically to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic which is currently a problem with ASEAN member countries. In this case, China is involved as a party to work together in preventing, detecting, controlling the COVID-19 pandemic. The result of the meeting was that the following nine points were agreed:

- a. Increase regional cooperation in fighting COVID-19 by sharing and exchanging information related to epidemiology and technical guidelines in the prevention, diagnosis, control, monitoring and treatment of pandemics with the aim of increasing emergency response capabilities.
- b. Strengthen ASEAN-led cooperation with outside parties to deal with COVID-19 comprehensively and effectively.
- c. Strengthen cooperation in communication to ensure that the public receives correct and not misleading information on COVID-19.
- d. Strengthen policy dialogue and exchanges on the latest developments in COVID-19, including control and treatment and related research through the ASEAN-China Health Ministers' Meeting (ACHMM) and ASEAN-China Senior Officials' Meeting (ACSOMHD) mechanisms to be fully implemented in the ASEAN-China MoU on Health Cooperation.
- e. Working together to increase the ability to prevent and control the

emergence and recovery of infectious diseases such as COVID-19, exchange of data and technology, capacity building for health workers, and the possibility of holding the ASEAN-China Workshop on Health Emergency Personnel and the Third ASEAN-China Forum on Health Cooperation.

- f. Minimizing supply chain disruption to essential medical needs and promoting R&D for pharmaceuticals and vaccines.
- g. Supporting affected companies, especially MSMEs, including through digital promotions to facilitate economic activities during the pandemic, and take advantage of the ASEAN-China Year of Digital Economy Cooperation.
- h. Support the use of information and communication technology for sustainable public health development.
- i. Committed to reducing the economic and social development impacts of the affected countries, together in improving trade, commerce and investment in the region, and continuing commerce and cooperation.

The ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Retreat was also held to discuss actions that can be taken for COVID-19 [7]. The meeting took place in Ha Noi, Vietnam and took the theme "Defense Cooperation for a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN". This meeting reflects the collective participation of member countries, especially in the field of defense. The results of the meeting were six points of the Joint Statement of the ASEAN Defense Ministers on Defense Cooperation Against Disease Outbreaks:

- Increase practical cooperation among defense institutions in ASEAN to organize and share information, and with outside partners, either bilaterally or multilaterally, including

considering holding an ASEAN military medicine center exercise.

- Leverage the Network of ASEAN Chemical, Biological and Radiological Defense Experts to enhance professional relations and scientific cooperation to tackle infectious disease outbreaks.
- Encourage new initiatives and ways of working together that contribute to ASEAN's efforts to fight fake news about the COVID-19 outbreak and ensure the public is properly informed.
- Proactively cooperate with other ASEAN sectoral bodies related to the response to COVID-19, and with countries from other regions.
- Take action for public health by supporting the efforts of individual country health authorities and using ASEAN regional health mechanisms for coordination and cooperation in responding to these threats.
- Remain committed to doing our part, and remain united to overcome the COVID-19 outbreak for the benefit of the ASEAN community.

B. Efforts to deal with ASEAN member countries that have the same response as the ASEAN Political-Security Community in overcoming COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic that has hit the entire world has now caused great harm to the world community and has had fatal consequences for various aspects of life, both from a political, economic, social, cultural and security perspective. Until now, the COVID-19 vaccine has not been found and is still being explored by experts and researchers. Several countries that are collaborating with scientific institutions are competing with each other to find the vaccine so that the world can be free from the COVID-19 pandemic. Because, if not, the world will be haunted by a prolonged global recession. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the aspect most seriously

affected was the economic aspect, almost all countries are currently experiencing a decline in economic growth. But not only that, the political and diplomatic agendas in each country were hampered by the pandemic. Several countries have options, including in Southeast Asia to hold it online or cancel the diplomatic event.

Various countries have made various efforts to deal with COVID-19, including ASEAN member countries, to increase security for communities and countries to prevent the spread and control of COVID-19. Most countries in the world make and carry out efforts to deal with COVID-19 based on the laws or *rechtsstaat* in force in that country. The state handles COVID-19 based on law, of course not without a reason, this is based on all countries that are based on law believing that law is a means used to build a better life for the nation and state [8]. There are at least three kinds of handling efforts based on the laws that are implemented by several countries. This effort is to issue several policies such as travel bans (travel bans), social distancing, and lockdowns. Of course, each country has different policies in using these three policies according to the situation and conditions of the development of the COVID-19 case in each country.

Travel banned is a policy made by a country in the form of restrictions or restrictions on citizens who come from certain countries affected by COVID-19. The purpose of the travel ban is to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and focuses on efforts to cure people suffering from COVID-19 in the country. One of the ASEAN member countries that has implemented a travel ban is Indonesia. This is done based on Permenkumham Number 11 of 2020 concerning the temporary prohibition of foreigners entering the territory of the Republic of Indonesia [9]. Apart from Indonesia, other ASEAN members also impose travel restrictions in accordance with the laws of these countries. The nature of the travel

prohibition policy is only temporary, then the policy can be changed according to situations and conditions that are more conducive than before. The next effort taken by ASEAN members is social distancing or physical distancing. Social distancing is the act of reducing contact with others, and avoiding activities that involve many people.

Handling efforts to issue social distancing or physical distancing policies carried out by ASEAN members is based on the following reasons: COVID-19 is very contagious and spreads rapidly, the incubation period is 2 to 14 days, and there is a high probability, where people are in place or public facilities do not acknowledge that they have been affected by COVID-19 [10]. ASEAN members implement social distancing or physical distancing by issuing a Work from Home policy (hereinafter referred to as WFH). WFH is a policy whereby activities such as teaching and learning are initially carried out in schools and/or colleges, and the initial process is working in offices, companies, department stores and so on at home, where these activities continue as usual but are carried out online. For example, Indonesia on March 31, 2020 issued Government Regulation (Government Regulation) Number 21 of 2020 concerning Large-Scale Social Restrictions in the Context of Accelerating Handling of Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) [11].

Apart from Indonesia, other ASEAN members are also active in attracting their communities in Indonesia to carry out their daily activities, which will require them to carry out social distancing or physical distancing. The last effort made by ASEAN members is the implementation of lockdown. Lockdown is an attempt to deal with/emergency protocols determined by the government of a country where in an effort or protocol an area or country access is closed within and from outside the region or country. Lockdown has similarities with large-scale social

restrictions, but the difference from large-scale lockdowns and social restrictions is that all public places or facilities that do not sell people's basic needs must be temporarily closed. People from countries or territories that have implemented the National Lockdown are only allowed to leave if they want to buy basic necessities. In addition, all citizens who are in an area or country implementing a lockdown are prohibited from leaving the region or country. Several ASEAN members that have implemented the National Lockdown are Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Brunei Darussalam and Vietnam. For example, Singapore implemented the National Lockdown policy on the grounds that it was ineffective in implementing a national strategy in dealing with COVID-19 [12].

The implementation of the National Lockdown policy is only temporary, not always a country will carry out a National Lockdown. Likewise, a country that implements a Lockdown can revoke the Lockdown rule if the subjective assessment of the state considers that the situation is more conducive than before. To date, the Indonesian government has not implemented a National Lockdown policy, given that the Indonesian government has recently implemented large-scale social restrictions. However, that does not rule out the possibility that the Indonesian government could issue a National Lockdown policy. If the Indonesian government finally decides to implement Lockdown (also known as health quarantine in Indonesian positive law), then the basic legal basis used by the Indonesian government is Law Number 6 of 2018 concerning Indonesian Health Quarantine. A number of handling efforts have been made in connection with state security by ASEAN members to prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, efforts to deal with it are still lacking because of the enormous public fear of the spread of COVID-19, so there is still a bad stigma in society towards victims of COVID-19 which makes the country even more insecure.

Then, COVID-19 is an epidemic that does not only occur in one country, but several countries both regionally and universally. So, it can be concluded that the ASEAN Political-Security Community, which has a special role in upholding peace and security in the Southeast Asia Region, needs to make further efforts to tackle COVID-19.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has endangered the lives of all residents of the region and their socio-economy and threatens sustainability and social security [13]. ASEAN as a regional body in Southeast Asia has an important role to coordinate cooperation between member countries to contain the spread of the virus in the region because it is a cross-border problem [14]. Meanwhile, ASEAN's initial efforts were limited to exchanging communications and sharing information on member countries on the current situation and updating responses. Further commitment of joint and collective efforts required action to prevent and eliminate the risk of a pandemic in the region in particular to assist Member States

The ASEAN Vision 2025 on Disaster Management highlights the importance of exchanging communications among the stakeholders involved. Since the announcement of the official outbreak in China, the ASEAN Emergency Operations Center Network for public health emergencies (ASEAN EOC Network), led by Malaysia, has taken the initiative to share daily situational updates on disease. The ASEAN EOC network for the public led by the Indonesian Ministry of Health Malaysia provides a platform among officials of ASEAN member countries working in respective crisis centers and/or disease prevention and control to share information in a timely manner through various communication mechanisms. They set up the WhatsApp mobile application for that purpose. The EOC Network produces a compilation of National/local Hotlines/Call Centers in ASEAN Member

Countries which are then shared with the public on social media.

The ASEAN BioDiaspora Regional Virtual Center (ABVC) for big data analytics and visualization is complemented by providing reports on national risk assessment, preparedness and response planning efforts. ASEAN published a risk assessment report for the international spread of COVID-19 to the ASEAN region on 10 April 2020 by ASEAN BioDiaspora Virtual Center (ABVC) to provide key responses and case overview of situations and deaths in ASEAN countries. Communication exchange is carried out through online meetings such as ASEAN health sector efforts in ASEAN prevention, detection and response to COVID-19. ASEAN Health (AHHM) chaired by the Minister of Health of Indonesia on 7 April 2020 held a video conference to intensify regional cooperation with various stakeholders and to increase actions to control the spread and reduce the pandemic. According to this meeting it was agreed on

- Further strengthen regional cooperation on risk communication to prevent misinformation and fake news
- Continue to share information, research and studies in an open, real-time and transparent manner
- Coordinating cross-border health responses; increase the use of digital technology and artificial intelligence for efficient information exchange
- Strengthen and institutionalize the preparedness, surveillance, prevention, detection and response mechanisms of ASEAN with other partners.

Further action has been approved by the leaders issuing the proposed ASEAN special summit declaration to establish a COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund to increase emergency reserves for future outbreaks (Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) 2020c). ASEAN has invited ASEAN Plus 3 (Japan, South Korea

and China) to contribute to this fund. Financial and resource mobilization is essential to assist member countries in procuring medical supplies and equipment that are currently lacking in some areas. The Strengthening Collaboration has been summoned by the special ASEAN Summit Declaration on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (14 April 2020). It follows the 7 steps agreed upon by the declaration including:

- Increasingly strengthening public health cooperative steps to overcome the pandemic and protect the people.
- Make arrangements to maintain supply chain connectivity.
- Further work builds on the multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral and comprehensive approach by ASEAN to effectively respond to COVID-19 and future public health emergencies.
- Take collective action and coordinate policies to mitigate the economic and social impacts of the pandemic, safeguard people's welfare and maintain socio-economic stability.
- Promoting effective and transparent public communication involves various forms of media including timely updating of relevant government policies, public health and safety information, clarification of misinformation, and efforts to reduce stigmatization and discrimination.
- Prioritizing the welfare of our people in ASEAN's collective struggle against COVID-19, and providing appropriate assistance and support to citizens of ASEAN Member States affected by the pandemic in their respective countries or in third countries.
- Support reallocating existing funds and encouraging technical and financial support from ASEAN partners to facilitate cooperation, including the proposal for the establishment of the ASEAN COVID-19 Response Fund.

V. CONCLUSION

Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) is a global pandemic, as it can easily infect one person to another in many countries at the same time, and for that there has been no vaccine to date. The impact caused by COVID-19 is very detrimental to countries and communities around the world in various aspects of life. All ASEAN members have been affected by COVID-19. ASEAN members have made various handling efforts related to aspects of national security, by issuing policies such as: Travel Banned, Social Distancing/Physical Distancing, and Lockdown. However, the APSC which was formed with the aim of upholding peace and security in the Southeast Asian region has an obligation to make efforts to deal with ASEAN members who have been affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Various efforts have been made by APSC with the implementation of the ASEAN - China Special Foreign Ministers Meeting on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and the 2020 ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting. Members are required to have good faith and prioritize shared principles of responsibility in carrying out the content of the meeting. So that COVID-19 prevention and control efforts in Southeast Asia and the universal region can be realized considering the contents of the two meetings are soft law. The ASEAN Regional Forum must also be held as soon as possible in the hope that the results of the meeting can be implemented into policies made by countries that have been affected by COVID-19 in an effort to prevent the spread and overcome COVID-19.

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