

INDONESIA'S ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY TOWARDS ASEAN

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Abstract: The activity of economic diplomacy, particularly trade cooperation at the bilateral as well as the multilateral level is an important instrument element of the state to stimulate economic development. As the 4th biggest world population, Indonesia has a strong potential for market of world's product. Indonesia is a source of raw materials with more competitive prices compared to similar items from industrialized economies. The research analyzes Indonesian economic diplomacy during the era of President Joko Widodo, covering 2014-2017, focused on two of economic diplomacy's activities; trade promotion and increasing foreign direct investment. The Indonesian diplomatic performances will be evaluated by SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat) analysis. Discussion focuses on economic diplomacy towards Vietnam, formulated into the questions: "How does Indonesian diplomacy in ASEAN, with particular case in Vietnam?", and "Why it is less appealing to invest in Indonesia?" As diplomacy is conducted at the bilateral and the regional level, the discussion would also include the implementation of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) to develop the Indonesian economy. One important finding is that Indonesian diplomacy in ASEAN needs to be developed in order to explore new market and business opportunities for Indonesian products.

Key words: diplomacy, economic diplomacy, Indonesia, ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), Vietnam.

INDONESIAN ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY

Economic diplomacy is the state's use of the full spectrum economic tools to achieve its national interest. It includes all economic activities, e.g. export- import, foreign investment, foreign aid and free trade agreements.¹ While the main goals of traditional diplomacy are peace and security, the economic diplomacy's aims are prosperity and welfare. One aspect of economic diplomacy is commercial diplomacy, which includes all aspects of business support and promotion, such as investment, tourism, Research and Development (R&D), and securing intellectual property rights. Besides the government officials, other significant actors are business institutions, such as the Chamber of Commerce, and the National Investment Coordinating Board (BKPM).

Economic diplomacy is supported by four activities, namely trade and promotion, investment opportunities, transfer of technology, and the management of foreign aid.² Because of the broad aspects of economic

diplomacy, this paper focuses on Indonesia's trade promotion and increasing foreign direct investment from Vietnam. Diplomats expected to have full understanding of economic aspects, as well as the ability to sell and promote the country's economic and business potentials in accredited countries. As both Vietnam and Indonesia are ASEAN members, the discussion also touches on the implication of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) to increase economic performance.

VIETNAM AND INDONESIA; AN ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

As the world's fourth largest population and growing economy, Indonesia is a potential market. The strength of Indonesia is its G-20 membership, supported by its GDP per capita of USD 3974.10 in 2016, and the world's most stable economy in the last 5 years.³ Vietnam population of 90 million makes it a potential trade partner for Indonesia. The growing and young populations in both countries create an opportunity to

increase the demand of goods and services. Since trade potentials have not been fully expanded, both countries provide a strong basis for cooperation. Indonesia has exported plywood, palm oil, paper and pulp, petroleum products, electrical equipment and spare parts as well as consultancy in building and highways. Vietnam has imported crude oil, and agricultural products.

As both countries having similar products, Vietnam is Indonesia's competitor in attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI's). Indonesia's previous advantage was its low cost of labor and political stability. However, since the economic crisis in 1998, investing in Vietnam became more appealing. Indonesia's reformation had positively made Indonesia more democratic than before when its unstable political condition creates a negative image. Industrial relations in several business sectors that involved foreign investors turned unattractive after the reformation era. Political uncertainty and changing business regulations added to disadvantages. As a result, Sony (Japan) closed its consumer plants in Indonesia in 2003, leaving thousands unemployed.⁴ The closure of Sony was followed by Toshiba and Panasonic in 2016.⁵

Vietnam had also defeated Indonesia's non-oil export values. In 2015, Vietnam's non-oil and gas exports reached USD150 billion, while Indonesia's exports amounted had only USD140 billion.⁶ A key point of Vietnamese economic diplomacy is increasing the competitiveness. Vietnam also opened trading access such as its membership of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), as well as signing more Free Trade Areas (FTA's). Even though number of FTA's between Indonesia and Vietnam amount to roughly around the same number, Vietnam could use the arrangements more effectively.

INDONESIAN TRADE PROMOTION TO VIETNAM

A significant effort to expand the market and increase export is participating in trade promotion, trade exposition, and established business forums.⁷ After years of bilateral cooperation, the Vietnam-Indonesia Business Forum (VIB) was established in 2017. The VIB Forum aims to support trade promotion and gained feedback from Vietnamese entrepreneurs regarding business

opportunities and economic policies.⁸ All promotions aim to reach the target of gaining USD 10 billion in 2018.⁹

As a maritime state, Indonesia has emphasized increasing the export of marine products to Vietnam.¹⁰ To attract investors, Vietnam held an annual international trade fair, known A THW Vietnam Expo, under coordination of the Ministry of Industry and Trade of Vietnam. Other agencies involved were the Vietnam Trade Promotion Agency, the VINEXAD-Vietnam International Trade Fair and Advertising, at the venue of the Vietnam Exhibition Fair Center (VEFAC).¹¹ Indonesia is amongst the participants at this event.

Since 2005, the Indonesian Ministry of Trade has actively participated in the Trade Expo in Vietnam.¹² However, participation in the Trade Fair should only be considered as additional promotion. The most important one is sustainable promotion through direct involvement in community affairs in Vietnam, for instance by providing sponsorships for events. Other promotion activities should also involve direct and indirect advertisements. These sectors, unfortunately, have not received adequate attention.

With a growing middle class, Vietnam also forms a potential market for the leisure and tourism industry. Indonesia has been involved in buyer-seller meetings held annually in Vietnam.¹³ Unfortunately, neither of the countries had established direct flights to connect major cities and tourist resorts. Current flights involved other cities such as Singapore and Kuala Lumpur to transit before proceeding to Vietnamese cities. This condition prevented mobility of people, goods and the services. Indonesian diplomacy should pay serious attention on connectivity issue.

INCREASING FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT

Indonesia has introduced an investment strategic plan for 2015-2019 to increase FDI from IDR 343.7 trillion in 2015 to IDR 570.0 trillion in 2019. To support FDI, President Joko Widodo's administration pays serious attention to building infrastructure, including toll roads, railways, sea toll, sea ports, and airports. Development has also been prioritized in the Eastern parts of Indonesia, as the region that was practically neglected by the previous administration. In investment policy sector,

the new government has also cut off regulations, simplified bureaucracy, and increased transparency. Previously, the slow bureaucratic process had prevented Indonesian diplomacy to gain success and compete with the rapid growth of the global market. The current condition of gaining investment to Indonesia is still overlapping regulations and different policies as applied between ministries and institutions. Another issue is related to bureaucracy that is considered as unsupportive to openness and transparency. Investment related bureaucracy and difficulties to process business permits had caused several potential investors to simply have cancel their business altogether.¹⁴ Besidethe difficulty to obtain permit extensions, another regulation that is considered to be a serious challenge to potential investors was the ability to speak Indonesian. These complications of bureaucracy caused cancellations to invest in what labeled in “remarkable Indonesia”.

On the other hand, Vietnam's new economic reform had attracted more investors. The policy of tax barrier removal had significantly attracted FDIs' flow to Vietnam and made the country more friendly country to investors.¹⁵ Moreover, its integration in AEC in 2015, and joining the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) have helped the country gain much in terms of economic growth, investment, export and income. ¹⁶

ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY OF INDONESIAN: A SWOT ANALYSIS

Indonesian diplomacy will focus on efforts to open non-traditional markets for Indonesian products. Traditional markets are Japan, USA, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, and the EU's countries. Non-traditional markets, such as the Scandinavian countries, Turkey, Mexico, Panama, Portugal, Ireland, Eastern Europe, and central European countries are potential partners for Indonesia to increase trade and investment.

The Indonesian economy relies heavily on agricultural products (palm oil, rice, rubber), as well as coal and minerals products. This characteristic is more or less similar to Vietnam, therefore, Indonesian economic diplomacy should find advantages of the existing exported products. The fact is that Vietnam is able to produce cheaper exported goods in comparison to Indonesia.

In the tourism sector, even though geographically speaking Indonesia is larger than Vietnam, however, Vietnam is the larger receiver of outbound tourists. The tourism sector is another potential field which Indonesia has not been fully developed. ASEAN's free visa policy could be used to take advantages from each other's economies. Both Indonesia and Vietnam have the potential of a growing middle class economy which creates a potential market. Considering these similar market characteristics between Indonesia and Vietnam, the two countries must consider themselves as partners for development. Through several policies and strategies, in 2019, Indonesia is projecting to increase its world competitiveness rating from 70th in 2013 to 30th in 2019. Indonesia has also projected to increase income contribution and foreign exchanges from this sector. In 2019, Indonesia targeted tourism sector will contribute 8% of the Gross National Income, with foreign exchanges amounting to Rp.240 billion and to provide 13 million job opportunities. This position will promote Indonesia to the league of 30 most popular world destinations. To reach these targets, Indonesia will need to negotiate direct flights, visa redemption, and build facilities and infrastructures to tourist destinations.

Based on above discussion above, below is the SWOT analysis of Indonesian economic diplomacy in ASEAN, with particular attention paid to Vietnam.

STRENGTH; LEGITIMATE GOVERNANCE FOCUSED ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

President JokoWidodo (Jokowi) of Indonesia started his presidency after winning the general election in 2014. The year he was elected was characterized by the development of an unstable global economy. Indonesia was amongst the countries that experienced instability. However, the Vietnam economies, along with Thailand were developed significantly. The new government had a strong commitment to develop the Indonesian economy. The Presidential agenda for 2015-2019, amongst others served to strengthen economic diplomacy, as well as to play an increased role at the bilateral, regional and global level.

In 2015 the government had established a strong national development foundation through fundamental transformation, and changed the mental paradigm from

consumptive into productive development. The subsidy for energy consumption that had been provided by the previous government had been reallocated for infrastructure. Developing infrastructures were not only focused on the island of Java, but also in other parts of Indonesia. The aim is to develop the eastern parts of Indonesia through attracting foreign direct investment in the region. In the following year, the government declared 2016 as “the year of speeding up infrastructure development”, both physically and socially. The policy was also followed by economic deregulation, with several economic policy packages. In 2017, the government determined to reach economic equitability as the main focus.¹⁷

To implement the strategies, the government revitalized several institutions to support the government’s development purposes. The institutions included the National Investment for Coordinating Board (BKPM) and the Indonesian Agency for Creative Economy (Bekraf), to support the Ministry of Trade and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, the President, popularly known as Jokowi, also established “Economic Diplomacy Task Force”, to support with information and other services to open new business enterprises overseas.

Jokowi also plays the part of leading actor in economic diplomacy, through state visits, bilateral as well as at multilateral organizations. As a member of multinational organizations, Jokowi has been promoting Indonesia in G-20, APEC, ASEAN summit meetings. Jokowi took advantage of Indonesian membership to promote business and investment opportunities.

Indonesia specifically provides the opportunity to invest in the area of infrastructure development and to build connectivity, within Jokowi’s first term of administration. The projects include building 24 seaports and deep seaports, railway tracks and a railway network to connect major Indonesian islands. Other investment projects include power plants for manufacturing and industrial areas, mass transportation within major cities, building a sea toll to support his maritime diplomacy.

The success of Indonesian economic diplomacy supported by some indicators, such as decreased number of poverty rate, stable economic development (average

5,2%), manageable inflation, the increasing rate of income equity, and the decreased of unemployment rate.¹⁸

WEAKNESS; INVESTMENT CLIMATE AND CORRUPTION ISSUE

The investment climate in Indonesia is less advantageous in comparison to Vietnam. Investors in Indonesia are challenged by too many regulations, where one government body is not supportive to the others. Regulation uncertainty is also triggered by bureaucratic complications, which have made investors less attracted to Indonesia. In addition, the lack of physical infrastructure in most parts of Indonesia made investment less attractive. After 3 years of administration, Jokowi’s government has made increased investment climates, indicated by, for example, the rate of “ease of doing business”, from 114 in 2015 to 72 in 2017.¹⁹ Even though the government had implemented several investment policies, the above rate is still lower than Vietnam (ranking 68th).²⁰ Singapore, another ASEAN member, ranks second in the category of ease to doing business 2017.

To attract investment, Vietnam has provided several incentives to investors. In addition, the communist government system ascertains national regulation implemented from the top level of government down to the lowest level. This political system has made Vietnamese economic diplomacy less challenging compared to the more democratic one in Indonesia, as it is supported by the government and its apparatuses.

Another factor related to the lack of investment factor is the high rate of corruption in Indonesia. Transparency International’s 2017 Corruption Perception Index ranks Indonesia as 90th out of 176 countries.²¹ Almost half of the types of corruption occurred within the civil service in the form of receiving bribes. Within the justice sector, including the police and court, it led to the ineffectiveness to enforce laws, the failure to uphold justice, and hence undermining the rule of law. Government investment is the sector most prone to gratification, in the process to obtain business permits and licenses. The high cost of investment in Indonesia is also due to the demands for irregular fees or concessions based on personal relationships, especially when the projects are related to government contracts. Corruption within the governmental

bureaucracy, as well as business sectors has undermined the investment climate in Indonesia.

OPPORTUNITIES; THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ASEAN FREE TRADE AREA (AFTA)

To implement economic diplomacy, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has prioritized the increase of diplomacy aimed to increase Indonesian people's welfare. The MFA, through its overseas representatives should play a role not only as marketers, but also opportunity seekers of Indonesian products. Diplomacy through negotiation has been conducted at the bilateral, regional, and global level. Indonesia and Vietnam, members of ASEAN, established the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) in 1992. After 25 years of implementation, AFTA had played a significant role to increase the economies of its members through several policies, e.g. lowering of intra-regional tariffs through the Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT) Scheme. More than 99 percent of the products on the CEPT Inclusion List (IL) of ASEAN-6, comprising Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, have been brought down to the 0-5 percent tariff range. These arrangements made intra-regional economic cooperation more advantageous.²² AFTA also cooperates with the region's largest export market, such as the United States, the European Union and Japan. The three economies of Japan, the U.S. and the EU, were also the largest sources of ASEAN imports. During the first half of 2002-2003, ASEAN-6 trade with major markets as a whole increased by 11.71 percent for exports and 6.91 percent for imports.²³

Indonesia's economic diplomacy towards ASEAN and Vietnam in particular is supported by the fact that both countries have a strong will to develop economic cooperation. During Jokowi's era, trade delegates have visited one another on several occasions, with investment promises. In several overseas countries, President Jokowi always promotes Indonesian investment opportunities, as well as opening business opportunities. Indonesian economic diplomacy has also been fully supported by other actors, such as the Indonesian Embassy in Hanoi, and the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), as well as the Ministry of Trade, Indonesian Chamber of Commerce, and the BKPM.

Another important opportunity is Indonesian membership and leadership of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). In 2017, IORA signed the Jakarta Concord and action plan for the period of 2017-2021. This leadership ensured concrete cooperation in terms of economy, maritime, small and medium enterprises (SME) and innovation. Furthermore, the IORA forum was also able to build a regional cooperation platform to face global economic challenges.

THREATS; OVERCOMING TENSIONS BETWEEN THE ECONOMY AND POLITICS

The Indonesian government had to overcome issues and relieve tensions in conducting economic diplomacy. Bayne and Woolcock mentioned three tensions of economic diplomacy; between economic and politics, between International and domestic pressures, and between the government and other forces.²⁴ Jokowi's government interest is to increase economic development, among others, through increasing investment from ASEAN countries. One way to pursue this is to develop infrastructures, especially in the eastern provinces of Indonesia. However, the goodwill of the present administration is often challenged by sharp criticism from the opposition parties. Critics said that the government did not pay adequate attention to human developments. Specific criticism appeared between the executive body dominated by the ruling party (PDI-P supported by National-Democrat) and the legislative body which dominated by opposition parties (Golkar, PKS, PPP and Democratic parties).

Tension between international and domestic issues indicated by the globalization era which required open markets and the implementation of regional Free Trade Areas (FTA). ASEAN had implemented the Free Trade agreement since 2015, in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, the Philippines and Vietnam. Three other countries including Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, will implement the system in 2020.

Another form of tension appeared between the government and other forces. These outside forces could play a positive or negative role in Indonesian economic diplomacy, such as the regional and international economic-political environment. One example is the

global economic crisis, or the increased price of world oil. The impact on Indonesia was the increased price of Indonesian crude oil prices (ICP) to USD 60.9/barrel in December 2017. Another influential global political issue was the crisis in the Middle East after the American President Donald Trump made a statement related to the acknowledgment of Jerusalem as the new capital city of Israel.

CONCLUSION

The success of Indonesian economic diplomacy in ASEAN is supported by strong will present Jokowi's current government to increase economic performance by various means. Two of the most important ways are to increase foreign direct investment, and promoting the Indonesian market in both regional and international communities. However, Indonesian diplomacy is challenged by bureaucratic issues within the Indonesian governmental institutions, e.g lack of coordination, overlapping regulations, and corruption that has almost become a culture related to Indonesian business practices. The issues led to a loss of appeal to invest in "remarkable Indonesia", in comparison to other ASEAN states, e.g. Vietnam. The opportunities leading to the success of Indonesian economic diplomacy were due to the Indonesian plan to develop physical infrastructures in Eastern parts of Indonesia. This means that many infrastructure projects are available to investors and developers both for domestic and especially international companies. Another significant opportunity consists of Indonesian activities in and membership of multilateral organizations, such as ASEAN, G-20, APEC, and IORA. These organizations are a significant forum to promote Indonesia to global audiences and to find prospective foreign investors.

Indonesian economic diplomacy is also supported by various actors, namely states, non-state, and business communities, to increase economic development. The actors collaborate and participate in trade promotion to attract potential foreign investors. As promoter of the nation, Indonesian diplomats have conducted various negotiations, formed cooperation, and signed agreements. However, several domestic challenges (such as the complex

bureaucracy and overlapping regulations amongst the government's ministries and institutions) have prevented Indonesia from pursuing a successful diplomacy. Since the purpose of economic diplomacy is to increase prosperity and welfare, economic diplomacy should be more proactive in approaching business partners and government as policy regulators in Vietnam. Domestic threat, such as Indonesian politico-economic conditions have been overcome to pursue a more successful course of Indonesian economic diplomacy in Vietnam. Economic diplomacy towards ASEAN, in particular Vietnam needs to be developed, to explore new market and business opportunities for Indonesian products.

NOTES

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