

Timorese Council approves border treaty with Australia

Lusa, 14 Feb. 2018 -- The Timorese Council of Ministers approved the text of the maritime boundary agreement with Australia, to be signed on March 6 in New York, officials told Lusa.

At the same meeting, on Tuesday, the prime minister signed the credential of full powers so that the Minister of State Agio Pereira can sign the document, representing Timor-Leste, confirmed the same sources.

The presentation of the text was made by Agio Pereira, "number two" of the East Timorese negotiating team, led by Xanana Gusmão, who managed to reach a historic agreement for Timor-Leste.

A source close to the negotiating team said that Xanana Gusmão, who led the "political" part of the negotiations, did not want to sign the document since it required the signature of a member of the Government.

Source of the executive confirmed that the document was presented to the Timorese ministers by Agio Pereira and the head of the East Timor legal team, Michael Wood, in a meeting behind closed doors.

According to the same source, "Ministers participated only because of the confidentiality of the document, neither ministers, secretaries of state, officials or advisors participated."

A source familiar with the case told Lusa that the document will be signed in New York on March 6, with witnesses to UN Secretary-General António Guterres and the president of the Conciliation Commission who mediated the negotiations between Timor-Leste and Australia, Peter Taksøe-Jensen.

The Timorese side will be signed by Agio Pereira, and the Australian side by Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, waiting to attend the ceremony of Xanana Gusmao by Timorese Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri and the Timorese Foreign Minister , Aurélio Guterres.

The fact that the negotiations took place within a Conciliation Commission set up under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and under the auspices of the Permanent Court of Arbitration makes the process - especially for the success of an agreement - a positive development for the multilateralist system.

As Lusa advanced earlier this month the agreement, whose exact contours are not yet known, puts the border line in the position advocated by Timor-Leste, that is, halfway between the two countries, as Timor-Leste has always claimed.

The middle line almost definitively solves the borders in the zone, after which Timor-Leste concludes, with Indonesia, the delimitation of other border zones.

Despite progress in meetings held under the auspices of a UN Conciliation Commission and meetings with partners of the consortium that has the license of Greater Sunrise, "there is still no agreement."

On the table are three potential scenarios: a floating exploration - championed by the oil companies that have the Greater Sunrise concession: Woodside, ConocoPhillips, Royal Dutch Shell and Osaka Gas - the connection to the pipeline linking existing wells in the area to Darwin or pipeline connection to the south of Timor-Leste.

The decision will determine the revenue sharing of the resource, with Timor-Leste receiving 70% if the pipeline comes to Timorese territory and 80% if it goes to Darwin, according to a source familiar with the negotiations.

The two parties meet again in Kuala Lumpur for a week of meetings from February 19 to 24, and formally, the commission's work ends on March 1.

After the signature, the treaty will have to be definitively approved once again by the Council of Ministers, after which ratification by the parliaments of both countries will be necessary.
