

Fretilin criticizes Timorese border agreement with Australia for giving Canberra much power

LUSA, 23 July 2019 -- Fretilin, the Timor-Leste opposition, said today it voted against the Australian border treaty on the grounds that the document gives away Timor-Leste resources and the power to deliberate on the development of the Greater Sunrise project.

“Today Fretilin voted against the resolution on the Maritime Border Treaty because it already paves the way for free sharing of resources with our neighbor. This treaty also gives part of our sovereignty to Australia the right to manage our wealth, which is within our territory,” explained Aniceto Guterres Lopes, parliamentary leader of the Revolutionary Front of Independent Timor-Leste (Fretilin).

“It’s merely rhetoric and contradictory these claims that with the delineation of the maritime border we gain full sovereignty, because this same treaty gives Australia decision-making power and also gives them 30% of our wealth in the Greater Sunrise field,” he said.

Fretilin was alone today in a vote against the resolution of the permanent border treaty with Australia, which was approved - together with a legislative package - by a large majority of 42 of the 65 deputies.

Repeating several of the criticisms raised during the debate, Fretilin questions in particular issues related to the Greater Sunrise wells, managed by a consortium majority-owned by Timorese oil company Timor Gap.

“The Treaty states that if the pipeline comes to Timor-Leste, then 30% of the revenue from Greater Sunrise gas field will be given to Australia. And furthermore it gives Australia the power to make joint decisions with Timor-Leste on how to develop the Greater Sunrise field,” he said.

“Simply put, if Australia does not accept the development plan, we will not be able to implement it. That means we will give Australia 30% share of the field for free, and we will give Australia our sovereignty free of charge to decide on our wealth,” he said.

The party notes that the treaty states that decisions on well development will be made on the basis of a plan to be developed by an authority, which will have two members from Timor-Leste and one from Australia, but despite the Timorese majority, decisions can only be taken by consensus.

He said that Fretilin wonders if this is a border treaty or “a wealth-sharing treaty with Australia”, expressing a doubt, which Lopes said, has not been adequately clarified by the Government.

The executive repeated during the debate that part of the Greater Sunrise field resides in Australian waters and that revenue sharing is therefore necessary.

The party also responded to government criticism of the previous treaty, noting that it was this text that allowed Timor-Leste to raise important revenues and at the same time pave the way for the treaty that was ratified today.

Lopes also criticized the statements made by the Government benches that the treaty represents the achievement of full sovereignty of Timor-Leste, which, he said, is not reflected in the sharing of revenues and decisions with Australia.

“What sovereignty are we talking about? How can we say that sovereignty is complete if through this Treaty we give power to another country to make decisions about our country’s wealth,” he said.

“Fretilin is not against the maritime border. Fretilin defends the maritime border delineated by the median line. Fretilin voted against the sharing of resources and the surrender of sovereignty that is included in this treaty,” he said.

Lopes concludes by stating that on issues like these “dialogue is the only way” even though the deputies of the Government “are a little allergic to this word”, being available for “dialogue with all entities in Timor-Leste seeking solutions of state and the people’s issues.”

It is recalled that MPs adopted a Government resolution ratifying the treaty - in Portuguese and English versions - and a set of annexes, including “Illustration of the Maritime Borders”, the “Greater Sunrise Special Regime”, the “Special Regime Area” and the “Transitory Provisions and Arbitration”.

“The outcome of the agreement is consistent with international law and both Parties considered a fair settlement as acceptable, as well as the creation of a stable and lasting basis for sea-floor oil activities between Timor-Leste and Australia with benefits for both parties” refers to the ratification resolution.

The ratification resolution was approved with 42 votes in favor and 23 against the deputies of Fretilin, party of the President of the Republic.