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ASIA / EAST TIMOR - Indonesia also in favour: East Timor approaches ASEAN

Dili (Agenzia Fides) - East Timor is making progress towards ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and could soon become a member. In recent days, even the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Marty Natalegawa, gave a favourable opinion, by giving clearance, as a matter of fact, for what concerns the admission procedure.
In the past, in fact, the new nation of East Timor (independent since 2002 and formerly part of Indonesia) was not admitted even with the status of "observer" (which Papua New Guinea now has): many ASEAN nations had refused to support East Timor in the name of solidarity with Indonesia. Today, Indonesia and other countries like Singapore are in favour because, according to the observers, they see in East Timor a possible area for fruitful economic investments.
According to local sources of Fides, admission to ASEAN would mean for the small and fragile nation, "a new period of internal stability and security". Even The President of East Timor, Jose Ramos-Horta has spoken in favour of acceptance, hoping that by participating in ASEAN, the nation could accelerate its path to economic and social growth.
Poverty in East Timor remains one of the most urgent facts: despite the natural resources available (especially oil and natural gas) more than 85% of the 1.2 million inhabitants live on subsistence farming and the poverty rate exceeds 40% of the population. The country is investing in infrastructure such as schools, roads, electricity and water. A garrison of the United Nations with more than 1,440 UN soldiers remains in East Timor, confirmed after internal disorders in 2006.
Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia are now members of ASEAN. Papua New Guinea has the status of observer. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 18/04/2011)

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