Maritime Boundary Delimitation Agreement with France

On 7 September 1987 the Governments of Dominica and France signed a maritime boundary Agreement in Paris. It concerned the demarcation of the boundaries between the island State of Dominica and the French Overseas Departments of Guadeloupe and Martinique in the Eastern Caribbean. The instruments of ratification were exchanged in December 1988 but the date of entry into force of the Agreement is not yet known.

The Issues

The macro-geographical factor had some relevance for the negotiation. Even a cursory glance at a map of the Eastern Caribbean Sea area will reveal that the general direction of the chain of islands form a broad concavity of coastlines along the western Caribbean Sea side, while a corresponding broad convexity of coastlines exist on the eastern or Atlantic Ocean coasts. Any delimitation in this area which is to produce an equitable result must take account of these relevant circumstances on the eastern and western coasts of the islands in the area.

Interestingly, despite the general convexity to be found on the Atlantic coasts of the islands, in the vicinity of Dominica and Guadeloupe, on the one hand, and Dominica and Martinique on the other, local geographical factors place Dominica’s eastern coast in a concave position vis-a-vis Guadeloupe to the north and Martinique to the south. The situation to the north of Dominica is influenced by the location of a group of small islands to the east of Guadeloupe and which project well to the north-east of Dominica. To the south of Dominica, a peninsular-type projection from Martinique stretches eastwards for some distance. When the eastward projections of French territories in the north (Guadeloupe) and those in the south (Martinique) are taken into account and the equidistance rule applied, Dominica’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is cut off at approximately 61 miles from its coast. This was the main issue to be dealt with so that Dominica could achieve an EEZ of 200 miles.

The boundaries to be settled included the territorial sea limits which Dominica had recently extended from three to 12 miles in 1981. To the west in the Caribbean Sea, France had already concluded a boundary agreement with Venezuela. That