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GBC Political Output Now Regulated by GRA - Not its Board

The response by the GSD on the issue of the appointment of the Board of GBC is a transparent attempt to avoid praising the way in which the Chief Minister, Fabian Picardo, has exceeded his pre-election commitment to make GBC politically independent.

The GSD consistently failed to secure GBC's partisan independence by appointing close political associates and relatives of the Chief Minister to the Board. At that time, the Board of GBC was the authority that made determinations of partisan balance in the output of the corporation. As a result, the people that the GSD appointed to the Board of GBC were the people who were then empowered to determine whether the GSD or the GSLP Liberals or other parties were right on any particular issues as to balance – with recourse being to the Courts of a party disagreed with any decision of the Board.

Mr Picardo changed that position dramatically by the introduction of the Broadcasting Act late last year.

The Act provides that the Gibraltar Regulatory Authority (GRA), an independent, self-funding, statutory body is now empowered to determine issues as to partisan balance in the output of the Corporation. There is no question of the GRA being anything other than totally independent. Indeed, in another very positive move, Mr Picardo has also recently amended the Act establishing the GRA to bolster and guarantee the independence of the regulator.

In the circumstances, any independent assessment would demonstrate that Mr Picardo has exceptionally exceeded his commitment to make GBC editorially independent of Government or of a Government appointed Board.

To go even further than that, the Chief Minister has also already announced that the establishment of Gibraltar Entertainment Networks Ltd will result in GBC being able to reduce or entirely extinguish also its financial dependence on Government funding. This will obviously also further materially enhance the perception of the Corporation's independence.

Chief Minister, Fabian Picardo, said: “The new Board of GBC I have appointed includes more women than ever have been appointed to it, a qualified accountant and lawyer, the Chairperson of the GFSB and people with established track records in the arts and broadcasting as well as members of the Jewish and Hindu communities alongside representatives of the management and staff of the corporation. They are responsible for corporate oversight of GBC as an organisation and no longer for any issue relating to editorial control in respect of partisan balance – matters now dealt with by the wholly independent GRA as I committed myself to do before the election. For those reasons it is patently obvious that GBC has never been so free of even potential political interference – quite contrary to the position when the GSD was in power, when the Board was made up of relatives and supporters of the party and it was the body responsible for determining issues of partisan balance. I am therefore very proud indeed to have been the Chief Minister responsible for ushering in true independence in broadcasting by giving power to determine question of editorial balance to the now truly independent GRA (ironically still the same person appointed by the GSD Government) as I committed myself to do before the election. I am also very proud indeed to have appointed such a strong Board to oversee GBC as a corporation. It is the right board, with the right individuals in it, to deliver, with GBC’s management and staff, a successful national public broadcaster with stronger Government support than ever as it seeks to become financially self-sufficient. The criticisms raised by our political opponents ignore these fundamental realities to make unjustified partisan political points that do not stand up to even the most basic scrutiny. The public are too clever to be fooled by such GSD shenanigans which will serve only to dent the opposition’s credibility with our discerning electorate. It is clear that any objective assessment of the situations at GBC today would recognise the huge progress made by this Government and would illustrate the irrelevance of the GSD’s commentary on the subject that turns a blind eye to the massive steps forward taken by this Administration to make GBC politically independent at last.”