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Magallo's Very Un-European Rant Does Not Surprise Gibraltar

Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar notes the publication of various belligerent and threatening news reports in the Spanish media over the weekend, culminating in an interview with the Foreign Secretary of the Kingdom of Spain, Jose Maria Margallo with Spanish newspaper ABC.

The statements are clearly made in ill-thought out defiance of the requests made of Spain by the United Kingdom when the Spanish Ambassador was called into the Foreign Office in London last Friday.

Indeed, the statements attributed to Snr Margallo by ABC are the most backward looking and threatening since before the frontier closed and are clearly reminiscent of the politics and tactics on Gibraltar deployed by the fascist regime led by Franco in the 50's and 60's.

Such statements will not bring anything positive to the lives of the Spanish citizens who live in the Campo area around Gibraltar and display no long term thinking from Spain about how to improve the lives of people in the region generally.

As usual, the first manifestation of this attitude are the threats to restrict the free flow of traffic across the Gibraltar frontier with Spain. Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar, nonetheless, remains committed to the application of the freedom of movement and free flow of people at the Gibraltar frontier with Spain in both directions.

Although Spain and Gibraltar are entitled to carry out immigration and customs controls at that frontier, the controls must be proportionate and not excessive, as has been the case in some instances in the past week or so since Spain started to try to bully Gibraltar by once again, as ever, using the frontier as a chokehold.

In the circumstances, Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar will be careful to ensure that the right of freedom of movement is not further restricted. Clearly, Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar also has a legal obligation to carry out Customs and immigration checks at the frontier with Spain and will carefully interpret what Spain considers to be "proportionate" in this respect.

Should Spain progress any proposal to impose a toll on entry and exit from Gibraltar, HMGoG would consider such action to be entirely contrary to the established principles of freedom of movement guaranteed by the Treaty of Rome, and would consider that Spain has unilaterally suspended application of the Treaty at the Gibraltar / Spain frontier, with all the consequences that might entail.

Despite alleged suggestions that Spain will seek to renege on the agreements reached in Cordoba, Gibraltar remains committed to the performance of our respective obligations under the Cordoba Agreements. Where any of the three Governments have any issue with these Agreements, the relevant matters should be the subject of renegotiation and not unilateral withdrawal by any of the three parties. That is the position of HM Government of Gibraltar in relation to the agreements relating to the use of Gibraltar Airport.

The Cordoba Agreements benefited people and commercial entities on both sides of the frontier. Undoing the Cordoba Agreements would consequently, therefore, potentially also have negative implications for people on both sides of the frontier, in particular Spanish pensioners who are in receipt of over a hundred million pounds sterling of British tax payers money. Ending the application of the Cordoba Agreements would cut both ways and would potentially put an end to the continuation of those payments.

The contemptible threat by Snr Margallo to require commercial aircraft to carry out more dangerous manoeuvres than necessary when operating out of Gibraltar airport is barbaric and prehistoric. It shows no regard for the safety of the people on aircraft and will remind international public opinion of the action by fascist Spain to the same effect, then at the direction of Franco and now at Snr Margallo's.

Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar does not wish to see any escalation in tension between EU partners and NATO allies like the UK and Spain and trusts that this will be avoided by Snr Margallo despite his belligerent rantings to the newspapers.

The Chief Minister said: "People in Gibraltar will no doubt remain very calm in light of the continued provocations which have appeared in the Spanish press this weekend. In this light, I welcome the statement by the Foreign Secretary, Rt Hon William Hague today confirming that the United Kingdom will be seeking explanations from Spain in respect of their recent statements and actions. Sabre rattling and threatening of the sort attributed to Sr Margallo today do nothing for the establishment of strong cross frontier relations. The people who live in Gibraltar and in the cities around us clearly wish to live in peace and to benefit from increased economic activity that can be generated from allowing us to work together to deliver growth in jobs and wealth for all the region. I therefore trust that the reports we have seen in the Spanish press this weekend remain no more than that. That is why this week, despite our many differences with the Spanish Government on many issues, we have agreed with the Ministry of the Interior in calling for the removal of photographs of Spanish law enforcement officers and the call for personal reprisals against them. I do not believe that a unilateral undoing of the Cordoba Agreements by any of the parties to them will benefit people on either side of the frontier, many of whom continue to reap the rewards of what was agreed at Cordoba on a monthly basis. In Gibraltar all parties remain strongly committed to the Trilateral Forum for Dialogue and trust that we will soon be able to renew dialogue to resolve all matters of mutual interest. The United Kingdom has repeatedly stated that it also remains strongly committed to the Trilateral Forum for dialogue. Perhaps most importantly we have seen many reasonable voices in Spain appealing for their own government to moderate their position and return to the Trilateral Forum. Even the PP in La Linea have called for an end to frontier

restrictions. I believe that the Partido Popular is starting to feel that pressure and is therefore trying to manipulate the media to sustain its neanderthal approach. None of this will deter Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar from acting as we consider may be in the best interests of our Nation. Gibraltar and the United Kingdom will not be able to stand idly by whilst Spain takes illegal action."