



**HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
PRESS OFFICE
No.6 Convent Place
Gibraltar
Tel:20070071; Fax: 20043057**

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Spain makes border changes before EU Commission arrives

On Thursday 19 September 2013, the Gibraltar Government was informed that the Spanish authorities had cleared and cordoned off the area behind the Spanish customs check point for pedestrians, where cars are normally parked, in order to use that area for the purpose of searching cars travelling from Gibraltar to Spain. In this way, the Spanish authorities ensured a smoother vehicular traffic flow from Gibraltar to Spain and therefore also the eradication of the build-up of queues on the Gibraltar side of the border.

It will be recalled that the practice for many years, which was intensified a few weeks ago, has been for the Spanish customs authorities to stop and check all vehicles on the green channel as they entered Spain, instead of taking any vehicles which they want to search or whose occupants they want to question to one side and allowing the rest of the vehicles to continue on their way. This has led to delays of up to seven hours to cross from Gibraltar into Spain over the last few weeks and to delays of about three hours to come into Gibraltar.

The Gibraltar Government has no doubt that the Spanish authorities are thereby preparing themselves for the forthcoming visit by a high powered delegation from the European Commission which will be coming specifically to inspect the nature of the Spanish controls at the border. However, the Government of Gibraltar has weeks of video evidence to show that Spanish procedures were changed only a matter of days before the delegation's visit.

This crude attempt at the last minute by the Spanish authorities to disguise and conceal the way in which they normally conduct such searches at the border, in a manner that is likely to mislead the European Commission, will be brought to the immediate attention of the European Commission.

Clearly, it would seem that the announcement of the European Commission's visit is already producing positive effects, even before the Commission inspectors arrive. The searches conducted yesterday are in stark contrast to what the Spanish authorities have always done which is to search cars on either the red or green channels and holding back the rest of the traffic whilst the search is being conducted.

It remains to be seen whether this will continue.