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Government urges EU Commission to put an end to the border delays

The Chief Minister Fabian Picardo has now formally notified the European Commission of the measures that have been taken by Gibraltar in line with the recommendations that had been made by them on 15 November 2013. This follows the expiry, on 15 May, of the six months period that the Commission had set itself to review the operation of the frontier between Gibraltar and Spain.

There are a number of physical infrastructure improvements in the frontier area already in place. This includes the creation of a control point for commercial vehicles at the commercial gate as well as electronically controlled vehicular and pedestrian access gates under the air terminal by-pass., the creation of control points for each of the vehicle lanes exiting Gibraltar, and the creation of two further vehicular entry channels into Gibraltar. A dedicated covered vehicle search facility is also in place. This is in response to the Commission's recommendations for exit checks to be conducted. The facility will also have two entrances/exits and an electronic control barrier at one of the exit points.

The Government has advised the Commission that a total of 18 new CCTV cameras and 4 Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) devices have been installed around the border area. This will allow the law enforcement agencies to track movements both entering and leaving Gibraltar. This is linked to the Frontier Monitoring Project (FMP) which will provide up to date information on queuing times, flow rates and camera imaging.

These works have been specifically accelerated in order to comply with the Commission's deadline.

There are also a number of other changes that have been made in order to comply with or facilitate the recommendations made by the Commission.

1. The number of Customs Officers is set to increase.
2. A number of operations have been launched on land and at sea under which Customs and RGP officers man strategic locations on a 24/7 basis in order to curb any illegal activity.

3. Further measures to be implemented to control the quantity of tobacco that can be purchased and carried on a person in the border area. This will involve a reduction from 1000 to 200 cigarettes.
4. Positive and close cooperation between the Government and OLAF (European anti-fraud agency) on tobacco issues.
5. Increase in tobacco duty to £ 13.00 for 200 cigarettes.
6. Amendment to tobacco licenses to reduce the hours during which the retail sale of tobacco can take place and to limit the amount of cigarettes that can be kept in any retail establishment.
7. New offence of concealing tobacco in a motor vehicle.
8. In-depth study and consultation into the implications and effects of Gibraltar's inclusion into the EU Common Customs Territory (CCT).
9. Supplied contact details of officers in Gibraltar who are ready to cooperate with their Spanish counterparts. Regrettably there has been no contact from Spain.

The Government has urged the Commission to ensure that Madrid complies with the recommendations made to them. There is an obvious lack of progress on the Spanish side of the frontier and a consequent delay in implementing the recommendations made by the Commission. Indeed, the checks conducted by the Spanish frontier authorities continue to be disproportionate and unjustified notwithstanding these recommendations.

The improvement of frontier flow across the border is something that Spain could do immediately without waiting for infrastructure works on their side.

“The reality is that the Commission's recommendations appear to have been ignored by Spain”, Mr Picardo has told Brussels. “Although we have seen some drawings published in some Spanish newspapers of proposed changes to the flow of traffic at the frontier, no works have been commenced. We are concerned that, as usual, Spain will simply seek to procrastinate and do nothing while trying to strangle the Gibraltar economy”, he has added.

The Government have urged the Commission to put an end to the inhumane treatment that EU nationals and others are subjected to at the frontier.