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HMGOG WELCOMES EU COMMISSION'S STATEMENT ON FRONTIER FLOW

PICARDO : "IT'S TIME FOR THE TRAFFIC TO FLOW NORMALLY"

Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar welcomes the intervention of the EU Commission in the problems caused by Spanish manipulation of traffic flows at the Gibraltar/Spain frontier.

In a statement, the Commission have recognised that the Spanish checks are disproportionate. The statement rightly reflects the Commission's serious concern about lack of progress on the part of Spain in implementing previous recommendations which were aimed at reducing long queues both to enter and leave Spain. The Commission statement also notes the continued high volume of complaints received from Gibraltar about long queues.

A further recommendation made to Spain by the Commission is that it should urgently further optimise risk assessment at border whilst ensuring highest flow rates and improve the physical infrastructure at the frontier.

Both Gibraltar and Spain have been urged by the Commission to develop information exchange mechanisms on tobacco smuggling to include daily co-operation between Gibraltar and Spanish authorities. Gibraltar has already agreed to do this by providing relevant contacts details but- Spain has failed to act on Gibraltar's initiative. Gibraltar reasserts its continued willingness to co-operate directly with the Spanish authorities on information exchange and through day-to-day collaboration on all law-enforcement issues, as has always been the case.

The Chief Minister of Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar, Hon Fabian Picardo MP, said: "The Commission is now, after two inspections, talking the language the Gibraltar and UK Governments have been talking over the past year. The Prime Minister was unequivocal in referring to the queues created by Spain for its own politically motivated purposes as 'disproportionate'. The EU Commission are now fully in agreement with that description. After the first statement from the Commission, when some were expressing disappointment, I said this was a marathon, not a sprint and I feel entirely vindicated in that now. It has taken

us a year, but the Commission have seen the reality of this situation for what it is and is now not hiding its displeasure with the Spanish attitude. Spain challenged Gibraltar in Europe on financial services, environmental issues and the issue of frontier flow. We have worked hard and persevered, working closely with the United Kingdom at both official and Ministerial level to implement the recommendations made by the Commission. By our achievements, we have shown that the position of the PP Government in Spain is unsustainable, untrue and unfair. We nonetheless continue to seek dialogue as the way forward to avoid unnecessary confrontations in the future."

Note for Editors

The intervention originally came about pursuant to the conversation of Prime Minister Cameron last year with Commission President Barroso when the Prime Minister complained of Spain's behaviour and asked the Commission to become involved.

This has been followed up repeatedly by Europe Minister Rt Hon David Lidington MP and by the Chief Minister Hon Fabian Picardo MP and Deputy Chief Hon Minister Joseph Garcia MP. All have described the queues as "disproportionate", exactly as the EU Commission spokesperson has now chosen to describe them.

Already in their first letter to Spain the Commission warned that the checks being carried out by Spain were in some instances "unjustified"

The remainder of the issues raised Gibraltar relates to the legislative measure to control tobacco possession in the customs area which had not yet been introduced at the time of the second visit but which has now been enacted and such enactment confirmed to the Commission.