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Spanish Smuggling Figures Inherently Contradictory

The figures given by the sub-delegate of the Spanish PP Government in Cádiz in respect of alleged smuggling of tobacco at the Gibraltar / La Linea frontier contradict the information published by the Spanish Tax Agency itself.

Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar therefore calls for less sensationalism and more rigour in the publication of statistics and an end to the attempt to criminalise Gibraltar and the Campo de Gibraltar

In a statement issued today by the Europa Press news agency, the sub-delegate of the Spanish Government in Cadiz, Javier de Torre, said: "Of all the seizures of smuggled tobacco at a national level, 60 percent are carried out by the Guardia Civil in the Campo de Gibraltar area."

Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar wishes to clarify that this figure is not correct and that using it must betray an attempt at further sensationalism.

The official annual balance of the Spanish Tax Agency (Agencia Tributaria) reflects that, during the year 2013, 55% of proceedings regarding the contraband of tobacco infractions (infracciones) took place in the region of Andalusia. This figure does not include felonies (delitos) for the same concept, that is, large scale smuggling. In fact, the figure of tobacco seizures, at the border between Gibraltar and La Línea accounts for 9% of total seizures in Spain, whilst those in the Campo de Gibraltar area (which also includes the port of Algeciras), make up 21%.

Mr. de Torre is not the first person to use the percentage of infraction proceedings carried out in Andalusia as if they were seizures in the Campo de Gibraltar. This has been a constant in recent headlines in the Spanish media.

For example, following a statement from the Spanish Ministry of Finance on 11 August, which erroneously reported that 60% of infraction proceedings took place in the Campo de Gibraltar area, media headlines reported that 60% of tobacco seized in Spain came from Gibraltar.

The Government of Gibraltar insists that the reality, as supported by official data from the Spanish Tax Agency itself, is that only 21%, and not 60%, of the total tobacco seized in Spain comes from the Campo de Gibraltar. Furthermore, the amount of tobacco seized at the border between Gibraltar and La Línea accounts for 9% of the total in Spain. This figure is very far from the 60% brandished by Mr. de Torre.

It has also become commonplace to hear a slogan which the Spanish media are continuously repeating and which was further disseminated this week by a Spanish Advisor to the European Commission's Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF); Mr. Joaquín González-Herrero commented that, in Gibraltar, every resident smoked a cigarette carton every twenty minutes, in order to explain Gibraltar's tobacco imports, thereby totally ignoring the fact that Gibraltar receives up to 12 million visitors every year and supplies ships, yachts and cruise liners, which must necessarily be taken into account in order to calculate reasonable tobacco imports for Gibraltar.

The Government of Gibraltar is aware that the Spanish Tax Agency does not provide full breakdowns of tobacco seizures, so as to avoid contextualizing the level of tobacco smuggling in Spain. Our Press Office has received numerous complaints from Spain and other countries regarding the denial of the Spanish Tax Agency to provide detailed information about seizures at all ports and border posts in Spain, instead giving only the overall figure and the data for Campo de Gibraltar. This is clearly designed in order to hide the fact that more instances of smuggling occur through Algeciras port than via La Linea's frontier with Gibraltar.

Finally, the Government of Gibraltar wishes to point out that the only thing achieved by publishing this partial and incorrect data, and thus making Gibraltar and the Campo de Gibraltar area into the main focus of tobacco smuggling in Spain, is to criminalise both territories and the residents thereof unfairly.